

**Managerial women and enterprise bargaining: the role of  
narrative identities in preference formation**

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The work contained in this thesis is entirely my own, except where indicated in the text.

Signed

A handwritten signature in dark ink, appearing to read 'Tanya Bretherton', written over a horizontal line.

Tanya Bretherton  
30 June 2005



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## **Executive summary**

This thesis considers key assumptions underlying research on women and enterprise bargaining, in light of unique qualitative data from the banking sector. Previous research in this field has argued that women workers will approach enterprise bargaining in a distinctly different manner to men workers. A drawback associated with much of this research however, has been its sole emphasis on women workers, without a concurrent analysis of 'male' approaches to bargaining or indeed, a refined definition of what would constitute 'male' bargaining. The qualitative data on which this thesis relies, presents detailed observations of women and men managers in a large Australian bank, in the lead up to agreement negotiations in their industry. Analysis of these qualitative commentaries presents an opportunity to explore a 'better case' enterprise bargaining scenario for women. The women and men featured in this case study share a similar occupational position (managers), have a strong history of union support, and demonstrate a high level of awareness of their workplace conditions. By examining workers in relatively stronger bargaining positions, it allows for examination of whether other factors remain to disadvantage or impede the ability of both men and women to negotiate effectively.

The thesis positions enterprise bargaining preferences in the context of literature on narrative identities. Four different narrative identities are found to be present among women and men managers in the bank – bureaucratic career narratives, diplomatic narratives, classic market narratives and institutional market narratives. The characteristics of two of these narrative identities – bureaucratic and market identities – have been well documented by previous research. In addition, the thesis posits the presence of two additional and distinctly different narrative identities to be present among bank staff – the institutional market narrative and the diplomatic narrative. These four, distinctly different, narrative identities are found to be important in the explanation of enterprise agreement preferences advanced by these women and men managers. In particular, acuity of risk and strategies to minimise risk are handled differently by each of the narrative identities. The four narrative identities use distinctly different strategies in seeking to minimise the risk that workplace restructuring poses to the formation of career, job security, and managerial status and professional identity.

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## **Glossary of abbreviations and acronyms**

ABS	Australian Bureau of Statistics
ACIRRT	Australian Centre for Industrial Relations Research and Training
ACCI	Australian Chamber of Commerce and Industry
ACTU	Australian Council of Trade Unions
AFBPW	Australian Federation of Business and Professional Women
AIRC	Australian Industrial Relations Commission
APRA	Australian Prudential Regulation Association
AWA	Australian Workplace Agreement
AWIRS	Australian Workplace Industrial Relations Survey
CBA	Commonwealth Bank of Australia
CEO	Chief Executive Officer
DEWR	Department of Workplace Relations
EA	Enterprise agreement
EOWA	Equal Opportunity for Women in the Workplace Agency
EEO	Equal Employment Opportunity
FSU	Finance Sector Union
GBE	Government Business Enterprise
HILDA	Household Income Labour Market Data
HR	Human Resources
HREOC	Human Rights and Equal Opportunity Commission
ILO	International Labour Office
OEA	Office of the Employment Advocate
RDO	Rostered day off
WRA	Commonwealth Workplace Relations Act 1996

## **Chapter one     Introduction**

### **1.1     The profound impact of decentralization**

This thesis explores the experience and outcomes to emerge from enterprise bargaining for a key group of managerial women workers in the Australian labour market. These women represent an important 'test case' to explore assumptions implicit to much research that has sought to explore the impact of decentralization for women workers. This thesis is positioned on the research axis of two profoundly important social movements – unprecedented growth and managerialisation of women workers, and an unparalleled level of decentralisation within Australia's industrial history.

Decentralization has dominated policy reform in Australian industrial relations for twenty years. More gradual reforms to decentralize have been advanced and implemented by Labor in the early 1990s, and more radically reinforced by Coalition governments in the late 1990s. Labor's most comprehensive bargaining legislation, the *Industrial Relations Reform Act 1993*, introduced measures to encourage bargaining to occur collectively at the workplace level for the determination of pay and conditions. The legislation also offered scope to negotiate enterprise agreements individually through Part VIB of the Act. The Coalition accelerated the process of decentralization, commencing with introduction of the *Workplace Relations Act 1996*. This legislation has expanded the role for and improved employer access to enterprise agreements, based on individual negotiation between the employer and the employee (through introduction of Australian Workplace Agreements). In addition, the award system has been effectively dismantled through award simplification. Changes to unfair dismissal legislation have improved the ease with which employers can dismiss employees without retribution. Limitations and restrictions have been placed on the rights of unions to enter workplaces. The Coalition government has, in its

own words, sought to “*overhaul the philosophy underpinning*” the entire industrial system (DEWR 2004: 1).

The impact of these moves to decentralize have been undeniably profound for Australian workers, particularly women workers. Statistics indicate that some form of agreement making (negotiations between the employer and employee/s) comprises the principal mechanism used to determine the wages and conditions for both women and men in Australia. In the federal jurisdiction in May 2002 (the most recent data available), national data collected by the Department of Employment and Workplace Relations (DEWR) indicate that only 21 per cent of employees now rely on awards for the determination of their working arrangements. This compares to 23 per cent of employees in 2000 and 68 per cent in May 1990 (DEWR 2004). While more women than men do tend to rely on awards (26 per cent for women compared to 15 per cent for men in 2002), the proportion of workers covered by awards alone has been dropping for men and women alike.

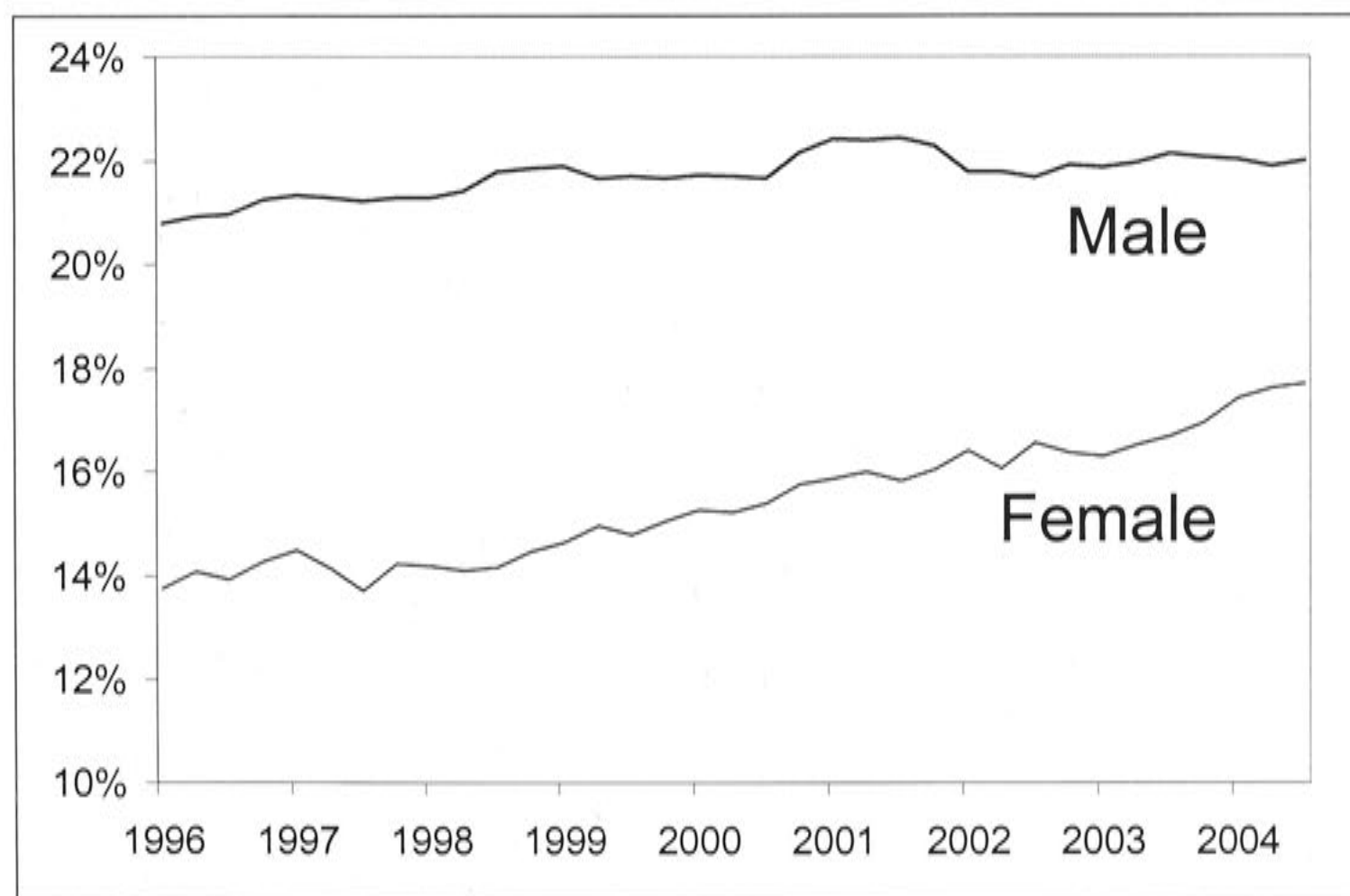
## **1.2 Changing profile of women in paid labour force**

The role of women in the paid labour force has also become a more prominent policy issue in the last twenty years. The profile of a typical woman worker has undergone a number of significant transformations. Researchers note that growth in women’s labour market participation rates was strongest from the early 1970s to the mid 1980s, but has nonetheless continued to grow steadily up to the year 2000 (Morehead 2003, DEWR 1999). More women are working full time than ever before recorded, although part time work continues to be done largely by women. The Australian Centre for Industrial Relations Research and Training (ACIRRT) (2003) also note that the strongest employment growth has occurred in those industries traditionally dominated by women, including the service sectors, while male dominated blue collar industries have declined.



Australia is still characterized by a high level of gender segmentation by industry, however, there is evidence that the proportion of women represented among more skilled, professional and associate professional, and managerial sectors of the labour market has been increasing. Women, more than men, have made significant inroads to the higher level bands of white collar employment. In Table 1 Australian Bureau of Statistics (ABS) labour force data has been used to show the significance of this shift. In Table 1, three higher level occupational classifications (professional, managerial and associate professional workers) have been aggregated, and shown as a proportion of all employees in the labour force (full time and part time workers are included), over a nine year period of observation. This nine year timeframe has been selected because it covers the period of observation relevant to the data collection for this thesis. The proportion of male employees engaged in these higher level occupational bands has remained relatively stable, and is still greater than the proportion of women engaged in these roles. However, the proportion of women engaged in these roles has grown strongly (in the order of four per cent) during this short time frame.

**Table 1: Proportion of professional employees in total labour force**



Professional employees are defined as managers, professionals and associate professionals. Source: ABS Cat. 6291.0.55.001 Labour Force, Australia.

As many researchers have noted, these relative improvements to women's labour market position should not be accepted without significant scrutiny. The story of women's advancement into management positions is still susceptible to the emergence of ghettos (Davidson & Burke 2000), with pockets of success confined to specific sectors. In particular, women professionals and managers are more common in the public sector (Durbin 2002), are often restricted to narrow fields of expertise (human resource sectors and finance sectors) and have only seen some selective improvements in women's skill levels (Wirth 2001).

### **1.3 Consideration of occupation is important**

While the statistical evidence points to bargaining becoming more commonplace in the industrial system, award reliance still follows some strong patterns across the labour market. Award reliance tends to drop as occupation and skill level increases. Table 2 is based on data drawn from the latest ABS Earnings and Hours survey (ABS 2003). The table shows that bargaining in some form, either collective or individually-based negotiations, increase as the status of the occupation rises. More than one third of all associate professionals and more than half of all professionals are covered by some form of collective agreement (within either the federal or state jurisdictions). Interestingly, there is a commonly held perception that managers only enter into individual forms of employment contract. Table 2 shows that managers are more likely to be covered by some type of informal agreement (almost 80 per cent of managers engage in these industrial arrangements). However, the outcomes of collective enterprise agreements are also significant to many managers in Australia, as almost one-fifth of all managers are covered by a state or federal certified agreement.

**Table 2      Industrial arrangement by occupational level, Australia, 2002**

Occupation	Reliant on award alone	Collective form of agreement (covered by federal or state instrument)	Individual agreement (formal)	Informal or unwritten agreement (either collective or individual)
Managers and administrators	<1	19	3	78
Professionals	7	55	2	36
Associate professionals	6	36	2	56
Tradespersons and related workers	26	26	2	46
Advanced clerical and service workers	12	21	2	66
Intermediate clerical, sales and service workers	25	33	1	40
Intermediate production and transport workers	18	43	3	36
Elementary clerical, sales and service workers	42	33	2	23
Labourers and related workers	34	36	2	27

\*Non farm employees have not been included in these calculations

Some rows may not add up to 100 per cent because figures have been rounded

This 'gap' in the analysis is important, because it suggests we still do not understand the negotiation processes and bargaining experiences of a group of workers who represent occupational groups at the forefront of the 'new capitalism'. This gap takes on greater significance when considered in the context of wider studies on organizational change. Studies by Handy (1995)



suggest that patterns of change in career development and the profile of a 'desirable' worker in the modern labour market may mean women are at a significant labour market advantage. Increased employer demand for so called 'portfolio' workers is one of the changes suggested as being beneficial for women in particular. There is some debate within the research community over whether new capitalism can truly deliver the range of benefits to women that are sometimes claimed (Wajcman 1998). However, there remain a range of provocative claims that remain unexplored within the enterprise bargaining debate (Durbin 2002).

This thesis seeks to investigate an occupational sector of the enterprise bargaining market that has not been explored by previous research – managers. The approach of this thesis acknowledges both two defining elements of labour market change – the growing professionalisation and managerialisation of women workers, and the growing importance of bargaining-based negotiations in Australia's industrial environment. I therefore argue that this research is both timely, and necessary because of its unique contribution to progressing the current state of the debate on enterprise bargaining and women workers.

#### **1.4 Decentralisation and women: the key assumptions**

Researchers concerned with the position of women in the labour market herald the last decade of decentralization to be one of the most dangerous waves of reform to occur for women in Australian policy history (Junor 1996; Bennett 1995; Burgmann 1994; Hall & Fruin 1994; Lee 1994). The forewarnings of these academics are grounded in the assumption that women will collectively face difficulties maintaining the pace of gains (improved wages and conditions) achieved by men (Burgmann 1994, Hammond 1994).

There is a considerable body of research arguing that decentralization poses some specific, and unique problems, for women workers. Seminal work by Whitehouse (1992) links poor wage and employment condition outcomes for women to

deregulated labour markets, on a global scale. Similarly, throughout the 1990s, Australian researchers have highlighted the importance of understanding the impact that the legislative environment can have on the generation of entitlements favourable to a balance of paid and unpaid work responsibilities, the ability of workers to secure these working arrangements, and obstacles that can create inequitable patterns in access (Baird, Brennan and Cutcher 2002).

This thesis argues that Australian research on enterprise bargaining and women has some clearly discernable themes. Two themes dominate within this literature, with both themes emphasizing the hazards that may unfold for women who engage in bargaining and negotiation. One literature grounds its arguments in assumptions about women's *exclusion from* bargaining. Researchers argue that women will be disadvantaged in an enterprise bargaining-based system, because the industrial environment is not one receptive to the involvement of women. It is argued that women will inevitably be excluded (overlooked and/or forgotten) by the bargaining process. These conclusions are drawn by identifying some key groups at particular risk of exclusion. Researchers note that women in highly feminised occupational groups, located within male dominated industries (in which a male dominated union has significant influence), are at particularly high risk of exclusion. A major, and well documented negative consequence to arise from women's exclusion from enterprise agreements, is poor wage outcomes. In broad terms, researchers fear that the introduction of enterprise bargaining will only serve to widen the pay gap.

The other literature argues that women's interests will be *marginalised while within* the bargaining system, and that this in turn, will perpetuate disadvantage. These claims address two aspects of bargaining – claims regarding process (relating to how the bargaining is undertaken), and claims regarding the content or outcomes of agreements themselves (in other words, what is bargained for). It is argued that women will be marginalised by process because women will be less able to assert themselves and influence outcomes in enterprise agreements.

Researchers also assume that women will be disadvantaged by the content of agreements because they will inherently seek different types of clauses (reflective of different working arrangements), and these priorities for content will not be shared by men. A primary assumption in this stream of literature is that women will be side-lined or marginalised by the bargaining process, because of the distinctive nature of their needs as workers. In other words, the industrial system and/or the bargaining stakeholders will be indifferent to the needs of women as mothers and carers.

Since the early 1990s, arguments supporting greater inclusion for women workers in enterprise bargaining have been fundamentally shaped by the understanding that primary care and unpaid work roles in society are still predominantly undertaken by women. It is argued that the inclusion of family-friendly clauses in an agreement are an essential prerequisite for bargaining to deliver positive outcomes for women. Researchers note that these issues, while argued to be critical for many women, are likely to be marginal to or face outright exclusion by many industrial campaigns (Bennett 1995; MacDermott 1994). The breadth of issues that need to be addressed within any enterprise agreement can be extremely broad and varied (including anything from wages and leave through to superannuation, retrenchment packages, or even the timing and placement of tea breaks). Family-friendly clauses are only one of many possible concerns to be negotiated in the context of an industrial campaign, and it is argued, these are unlikely to be a main priority for many male dominated unions.

### **1.5 An alternative to the worst case scenario: testing assumptions**

This thesis argues that the major arguments about women and enterprise bargaining have been structured, or modelled, around workplace circumstances that might be described as 'worst case scenarios'. To date, researchers have more thoroughly explored how these disadvantages manifest for women in less skilled and more marginal sectors of the labour market. It is argued that the masculinized nature of many industrial negotiations means that women will be less likely to



negotiate agreements that are comparable to the wage increases achieved by the large scale, male dominated and highly militant unions. Based on this approach, researchers see little potential for women to either take advantage of any opportunities available in a bargaining-based industrial environment, nor use bargaining to ameliorate unfavourable working arrangements. While this thesis does not reject the arguments identifying the risks associated with enterprise bargaining, it does argue that further research in this field must make a concerted effort to address the gaps within this research domain.

This thesis seeks to test key assumptions of marginalisation associated with enterprise bargaining and women. As the literature review will show, little bargaining research has addressed professional or managerial women in its analysis. Instead, the analysis has sought to map generic enterprise bargaining outcomes (for example, charting differences in annual earnings). The analysis of this thesis, in contrast, explores the bargaining experiences of a key group of professional and managerial women workers who have access to a 'better case' bargaining scenario. The analysis will be conducted using a case-study based analysis. This case study will first identify the content of preferences voiced by men and women managers. Then, the experience of these managers in articulating and communicating these preferences will be explored. An analysis of the agreement itself will follow, to see if men's or women's preferences are privileged by the agreement making process.

This thesis acknowledges the value and importance of understanding the macro outcomes that emerge for women as a result of enterprise bargaining. However, this thesis argues that a micro or workplace-based analysis of enterprise bargaining and women is both timely, and necessary, for progression of the debate on this issue. This thesis accepts that workers in vulnerable and unskilled sectors of the labour market do face significant challenges in a bargaining-based industrial environment. However, the changing profile of women in the labour market suggests that women are at an occupational cross roads (see table 1). As

women increase their representation in skilled sectors of the labour market, it will be imperative to understand the range of outcomes that might emerge for women and whether the conditions do exist for women to take advantage of the opportunities that the federal government claims are currently available for women in the changed industrial environment.

The first set of assumptions that this thesis will test is that men and women will advance preferences that are inherently different. A first step in this process is to identify what the preferences of men and women are. Researchers have assumed that the inherently different labour market needs of women, who bear a greater burden for unpaid work, will affect the preferences of women more than men. The second set of assumptions suggest that the masculinist nature of the industrial environment means it will be unreceptive to women's concerns and distinct labour market needs. The third assumption is that the agreement, therefore, will not reflect the content of women's preferences.

This thesis places particular emphasis on highlighting and examining worker preferences, and the value that analysis of preferences may bring to wider understanding of enterprise bargaining. The literature review of this thesis will establish the need to predicate future bargaining research on worker preferences. Firstly, worker preferences are poorly understood in the context of current bargaining research, having received little attention in the bargaining literature. This means that worker behaviour, and the formation of preferences and attitudes to enterprise agreements and the negotiation process are not well understood. Secondly, while a number of assumptions have been made with regard to women's preferences (in particular the belief that family-friendly clauses will be predominant) these assumptions have been subjected to little testing. Thirdly, there is growing awareness among researchers that analysis relying solely on agreement content (outcomes) is deficient because it fails to understand the workplace environment (level of employer receptiveness) to worker access of entitlements.

This thesis seeks to extend understanding of impacts of enterprise bargaining on women to a new (and previously unexplored) occupational group. A wide and extensive body of research has been building for some thirty years documenting the ways in which men can actively discriminate against women, and behave in ways to marginalise the interests of women in the workplace. While much of this literature has influenced the direction of research on the impact of enterprise bargaining, the issues associated with this marginalisation (and how it may or may not manifest) have not been directly addressed by the literature.

## **1.6 Necessity for a workplace focus**

There is strong consensus among researchers that it is becoming increasingly difficult to describe and map the 'typical course' of a working life in Australia (ACIRRT 1999a). The impact felt by widespread restructuring and downsizing processes have meant that the conditions and circumstances at the workplace level have become all important in determining the quality of life of employees. These changes have been felt in both the dispersion in forms of employment (part time and shift arrangements) and the terms of engagement for employment (casual and contract arrangements). The growth in non-standard employment represents one of the most important changes in the structure of the labour market for the last fifteen years (Campbell 2000). Forces of both supply and demand have been named as responsible for this growth. The growth in women's labour market participation of women is cited as being a significant driver of casual and more flexible forms of employment (Wooden 1998). The ageing population is also argued to have an impact on the drift to more flexible hours arrangements. As the baby boomer cohort moves towards retirement, it is argued they will seek working arrangements that facilitate a gradual retirement from the workforce so that income flow can be maintained while easing the intensity associated with full time work. This phenomena has been termed 'downshifting' and employees have been named as a driving force for this shift (Kahana, Kahana and Kercher 2003).



A strong body of literature also names employers as the driving force for more flexible forms of employment arrangements. Researchers such as Sennett (1998) describe these shifts as integral to the 'new capitalism'. It is argued that employers now place greater emphasis on relationships with employees that are short term, and make little commitment to the employee in terms of skill development (Buchanan 2001; ACIRRT 1999).

The need to bring greater workplace focus to enterprise bargaining analysis is also driven, to some extent, by statistical 'necessity'. Further progress in the debate on enterprise bargaining and women is also currently hamstrung by two problems. A lack of national, reliable data about agreements and coverage of men and women workers across all industries has certainly contributed to stalling the debate. Without exception, researchers acknowledge the dearth of gender disaggregated data on enterprise agreement outcomes (Frino, Hall and Heiler 1999). In most large scale quantitative research projects, industry analysis has had to suffice as a proxy for gender. As researchers have noted, for a number of reasons, industry analysis used to draw insights about gender outcomes may not be a sustainable research strategy. The splintering of agreements across industries (for example, the increased use of multiple agreements at a single work site) means that industry wide observations are becoming less useful, and ultimately inaccurate.

A wider problem relates to the way in which women, as enterprise bargaining participants, have been characterized by research methods. While gender matters are not absent from the study of industrial relations entirely, researchers have noted that even gendered analyses of industrial phenomena suffer serious flaws. A significant problem to date, has been the tendency to consider women worker interests in isolation, and the categorization of women's needs as inherently different or 'abnormal' to those of men workers. This thesis proposes a different starting point for its analysis by drawing directly on the experiences and perspectives of men and women workers to understand the impact and meaning of bargaining to the employee participants. This thesis acknowledges the structural

disadvantages that women face in bargaining, but argues that more voice needs to be given to women's responses to these challenges in order to progress understanding of bargaining.

### **1.7 Approach and key questions of this thesis**

This thesis uses a workplace-based case study for its analysis. The case study is based in a large Australian bank, and focuses exclusively on a key occupational group – women and men in manager and assistant manager positions. In other words, the focus group participants are not at the bottom rungs of the occupational ladder in their workplaces. They are all workers who have higher levels of responsibility, and have some responsibility for supervision and management within their scope of duties. This presents a unique opportunity to explore the preferences, and perceptions of enterprise bargaining for a key group of women workers who do not represent the most marginalized nor the most vulnerable in the labour market. This thesis proposes an alternative way of assessing and evaluating the enterprise agreement. The thesis will explore previously unpublished focus group transcripts, which document in detail, the agreement preferences of more than 300 bank workers (both women and men) at the most critical point in the build up to the formation of the agreement. This focus group data, collected in 1999, provides a rich source of qualitative data. The data comprises almost forty hours of transcribed conversations between men and women workers, collected in a controlled research environment. Although the Finance Sector Union (FSU) commissioned the research, the focus groups were conducted and chaired by independent researchers not attached to the union.

In addition, this thesis contends that insufficient distinction has been drawn between the variety of experiences that bargaining may offer for different groups of women. This allows for exploration of two basic premises that characterize this field of research – whether the experience of women in bargaining is more or less homogeneous (with occupation being less important to explanations of bargaining disadvantage) and identification of the preferences to test or



benchmark an enterprise agreement's actual accuracy in 'hitting the mark'.

Therefore, this thesis is guided by a specific research question: *Are the preferences of managerial women workers marginalized by enterprise bargaining?*

The selection of a single workplace case study means that all workers are in a common workplace and sectoral setting. Although the workers are not all located in the same retail bank branch, the issues for the majority of the workers are very similar. In particular, the women managers who participated are not a marginal group of white collar workers in a large male dominated industry (for example metal or mining), and the men and women are immersed in (or exposed to) the same workplace culture and industry setting. Their respective experiences of this culture may be an issue that is important to consider in the context of understanding the formation of preferences.

The thesis deliberately seeks to conduct a comparative analysis of men and women worker preferences. This will overcome the problems faced by previous research that has sought to reflect only the perspective of women workers, without developing a wider understanding of the views and attitudes held by men workers (Austen, Jefferson and Thein 2003). The data was not collected specifically targeting 'women' and the focus groups did not aim to address specifically 'women's issues'. Participants were free to raise and discuss any issues of workplace concern, and raise the topics that should be addressed by future agreements.

## **1.8 Conclusion and chapter structure**

The next chapter will draw on a number of literatures in order to inform the analysis of this thesis. This review will identify any main themes present within the literature, will identify the main conclusions drawn, and will provide a critique of the methodological approaches that have been used by researchers in the industrial relations field. The following review will identify any gaps that need to

be addressed, in order for this thesis to bring new insights and understanding to this topic of research. Chapter three will outline the methodology for this thesis, which seeks directly to address the gaps associated with a research approach geared primarily toward developing a macro and outcome-focused picture. Chapter four establishes the context for the bank, as the case study setting for the analysis. Chapter five identifies the central problems faced by the workforce. This chapter considers whether the defining areas of difference between the preferences offered by men and women pivot on family-focused preferences. Chapter six and seven explore the assumptions associated with marginalisation. These chapters explore the motivation for the preferences offered, and provides an alternative explanation for the pattern of preferences. Comparative analysis of the narrative identities presented by men and women show that narratives, and the sense of identity and career defining the experience of these managers, is also a defining element of their enterprise agreement preferences. The narrative identity typology is directly applied to men's and women's preferences in chapter eight. Chapter nine provides an analysis of the agreement to see if the final written enterprise agreement provides a more comprehensive reflection of either men's or women's preferences.

### 2.1 Introduction

This chapter introduces the field of scholarship on women and enterprise bargaining and argues that two distinct waves of research are apparent. The first wave of research surfaced in the early 1990s, reaching a peak in the mid-1990s. Much of this early literature sought to identify broad-based or 'generic' outcomes that might emerge for women under a bargaining-based industrial relations system. A second wave of research is evident in the post 2000 period, which attends to a greater level of workplace focus. This latter period of research appears less concerned with understanding aggregate outcomes, and seeks to explore questions associated with dispersion and variation in outcomes for women under bargaining. This thesis argues that this latter wave of research represents the more sustainable methodological approach. Firstly, the lack of gender disaggregated data in this field means that an 'aggregate' account of women's and men's experience will become increasingly difficult to establish in coming years. Secondly, this thesis argues that an approach confined to mapping broad outcomes cannot provide the level of insight necessary to explain the workplace-level factors that may either intensify, or ameliorate, the negative impacts reputed to be associated with bargaining for women. In effect, a decentralised system warrants a decentralised methodology.

Research exploring the impacts of enterprise bargaining for women in Australia has historically been dominated by the discipline of industrial relations. This thesis argues that understanding the impacts of bargaining can be enhanced by drawing more broadly from disciplines that lie beyond industrial relations. Therefore, this thesis will draw from management studies, organisational culture studies and sociological research to inform its analysis.

### 2.2 Scope of the review

Before commencing the literature review it is necessary to provide some clarification of the definition of enterprise bargaining that will apply for the



purposes of this thesis. There is persisting confusion within the research community over which forms of employment contract and/or agreement should fall within a definition of an 'enterprise agreement'. As Macdonald, Campbell & Burgess note, "*Australian discussion of 'enterprise bargaining' has been poor*", and that "*diverse meanings compete for attention, often within one text*" (2001: 3). Criticisms of this type stem from two main concerns, raised by McDonald et al (2001) but also others (ACIRRT 1999).

One concern pertains to the 'catch-all' manner used to define enterprise agreements. For example, a wide number of employment contracts (industrial instruments) can act as legally binding documents on employers and employees, yet still fall within a broad definition of 'bargaining'. Some certified agreements, for example, are very detailed and complex, setting out wider expectations with regard to employee behaviour and addressing aspects of personnel and human resource management policy. At the greatest extreme, a certified agreement in the public sector (for Centrelink) is more than 150 pages in length. In contrast, other legally binding industrial contracts are applied in a more 'minimalist' way. For example, some Australian Workplace Agreements are only a few pages in length, and detail only remuneration, leave and redundancy arrangements. Given the diversity of these arrangements, some researchers argue it is not possible to compare outcomes with (potentially) very dissimilar content (Arsovska, Heiler & Hall 1999). As Preston & Crockett (1999) note, although enterprise bargaining is found in both New South Wales (NSW) and Western Australia (WA), the foundation of each system is very different. In the NSW and federal jurisdictions, the systems are broadly founded on a collectivist form of agreement making, while WA is essentially individualist.

Taking the federal legislation as an example, there are indeed a wide range of very different types of employment contracts and arrangements offered within just one jurisdiction. The table below sets out a range of 'non-awards', that could all fall within a stream of negotiations termed 'enterprise bargaining'. It should be noted that this sets out a range of alternatives for only those workers

covered by the federal system, and depending on the state system, the options expand further.

**Table 3      Range of agreement alternatives available under the Commonwealth Workplace Relations Act 1996**

<b>Employment arrangement</b>	<b>Features</b>
<b>Non-agreement based</b>	
Award minimum only	Agreed at industry or occupational level. Often negotiated with union and multiple employers. Ratified by Industrial Relations Commission.
Overaward wages and conditions	An additional bonus or overaward that is unilaterally set by management (ie without any prior consultation with the employees concerned) <sup>1</sup>
<b>Agreement based</b>	
Federal certified negotiated with union	Negotiated and signed off by the union with the employer, on behalf of a group of employees
Federal certified without union	Employees collectively negotiate the agreement, without the involvement of a union
Contract with individual employee	Australian Workplace Agreement. Contract of employment is between individual employee and employer. The union can negotiate as the appointed advocate of individual employees, but only if specifically nominated by employee

The second ‘definitional’ concern with enterprise agreements pertains to the broadly held assumption that bargaining is a radical new introduction to the Australian industrial relations landscape. The term ‘enterprise bargaining’ is often used interchangeably with the term ‘decentralisation’ (MacDonald, Campbell & Burgess 2001). While it is often assumed that enterprise bargaining is the term used to refer to agreements or contracts that are specifically workplace-focused in their terms and conditions (Morgan 1994a), this is not always clearly stated. As Table 3 shows, this can include a wide range of very different employment contracts and arrangements. Some of which, particularly in the case of certified agreements with unions, were

<sup>1</sup> This definition was used to categorise and analyse agreements and contracts in the Australian Workplace Industrial Relations Survey. This survey represents the most comprehensive national data set ever collected on agreement form and characteristics in Australia. See Morehead, Steele, Alexander, Stephen & Duffin (1997: 214) for more information. The wider table was compiled from analysis of arrangements available under the Commonwealth *Workplace Relations Act 1996*.



common place before the decentralisation policy process that commenced in the late 1980s and early 1990s. Equally, unwritten or unregistered agreements (or verbal agreements) have also been a long standing feature of employment arrangements in Australia, particularly in the small business sectors (Campbell 1993).

Both Labor (DIR 1994) and the Coalition government (2005) have both claimed to be the 'first' to properly introduce the concept of bargaining to Australian workplaces. However, as researchers such as Wooden (2000) note, bargaining has long been an institutionalised part of the industrial relations system. Wooden (2000) therefore goes so far as to liken much of the so called 'debate over the impact of enterprise bargaining' to hyperbole.

This thesis acknowledges the dangers of a catch all approach to enterprise bargaining terminology, but argues that this literature review should apply a fairly broad definition. It argues this for a number of reasons. Firstly, including women and enterprise bargaining research that addresses all forms of decentralised bargaining allows for a sweep of the literature to identify all key issues relevant to understanding impact, cause and effect. Secondly, as this review will show, a strong contingent of researchers in this field would argue that it is the entire stream of non-award bargaining that is a danger for women, and so making more subtle distinctions between different forms of bargaining is less relevant. It is necessary to adopt a broad definition in order to address the validity of these arguments.

The Australian research emphasis on collective forms of agreements has emerged, in part, from necessity. Other forms of agreement making in the federal arena, Australian Workplace Agreements (AWAs) and individual contracts are both legally bound by a range of confidentiality and privacy restrictions. In the case of AWAs, confidentiality restrictions apply (as defined by the *Workplace Relations Act 1996*), and so are not readily available for scrutiny unless special exemption is granted by the Office of the Employment Advocate (OEA), and only then for particular research purposes. As both ACIRRT (1999) and the ACTU note, this places a significant

constraint on the ability of researchers, or indeed policy makers, to patrol the outcomes that have truly emerged from these forms of agreements. In the case of individual contracts, similar problems emerge for analysts as these documents are governed by the intricate web of privacy restrictions contained in the body of contract law. In effect, researchers have focused largely on collective agreements (certified), by default, because the material is more readily available. Therefore, this literature review will largely deal with research that has focused on collectively negotiated agreements, however, it will also include research findings that deal with other streams of agreement making where this is available and deemed pertinent to the analysis.

### 2.2.1 The waves of research

The most comprehensive research on this topic tends to precede, or follow, the introduction of legislative change believed to be significant by commentators and researchers. Therefore, two bouts of literature are evident - to coincide with the introduction of Coalition reform to encourage its own forms of enterprise bargaining (the *Workplace Relations Act 1996*) and Labor's enterprise bargaining legislation (the *Industrial Relations Reform Act 1993*). Much of the literature reviewed in this chapter deals with the predicted, rather than actual impacts, associated with enterprise bargaining for women. This thesis reviews more recent literature, where it is available, however there has been a notable decline in research on this topic in the last five years. For the purposes of this thesis, it is important to note these waves of research, otherwise it may appear that this chapter is being deliberately selective in its review of material.

The most basic observation that can be made about industrial relations writings on the impact of enterprise bargaining on women has been its emphasis on the development of a coherent 'macro' picture. Researchers have described this as the 'global view' methodology (Durbin 2002: 759). This need to map broad outcomes has certainly been an important priority for researchers seeking to lobby for change.

### 2.3 Modelling on the worst case scenario

This thesis argues that industrial relations research in this field has based its exploration on two key assumptions that remain, in large part, untested empirically. The first assumption suggests that women workers will be driven by a 'different' bargaining agenda. In other words, women's preferences for the content of agreements will be inherently different to men's. A second assumption suggests that women engage in the process of bargaining in a way that is distinctly different to men. This thesis will seek to explore the validity and applicability of these assumptions in generically describing the experience of women in the modern Australian labour market.

Australian commentators (Meredith Burgmann, Eva Cox), researchers (Whitehouse 2001, 1992; Probert 2000b; Junor 1997) and women's organisations (Women's Pay Equity Coalition, Women's Electoral Lobby and the Women's Economic Think Tank) have expressed a wide range of concerns about women's vulnerability in the labour market. They argue enterprise bargaining has the potential to erode conditions and improvements to pay arrangements won by women workers. These arguments are not confined to academic speculation alone, but are widely acknowledged at an institutional level. In a National Women's Consultative Council (NWCC) report, the Australian Industrial Relations Commission's official statement, upon the introduction of bargaining is, cited as follows: "*We do accept, however, that enterprise bargaining - especially bargaining for overaward payments - places at a relative disadvantage those sections of the labour force where women predominate*" (NWCC 1992). So, while publicly rejecting the concerns of women's lobby groups, the AIRC also noted specific concerns with regard to women in lower status positions of the labour market.

Characterisation of women as vulnerable, permeates writings on the impact of enterprise bargaining. Whitehouse (1992) notes that the ability of women to make gains in a bargaining-based industrial system is highly dependent on other institutional and policy frameworks that define the terms under which the bargaining occurs. As Whitehouse notes "...the most successful efforts to date to ameliorate gender-based earnings inequality have been those driven



by a collective logic" (1992: 83). Hochschild (1997) notes the growing chasm between labour market developments which are antagonistic to family and work balance, while governments increasingly embrace and espouse the value of family-friendly policy. The strength of conviction of these researchers is evident in the following statement:

*"Enterprise bargaining does not occur in a static environment, but in one in which organisational and other changes are likely to push bargaining outcomes in directions unfavourable to the majority of women workers"* (Bennett 1995: 128).

A proposed range of liberal feminist reforms that might seek to mitigate or reduce these inequities have been criticised by a range of industrial relations researchers as being ineffective.

*"It is impossible to escape the weight of international evidence that decentralised bargaining systems have a greater degree of gender-based inequality than centralised ones. Legislative protections and individual redress are on their own inappropriate mechanisms for addressing the systemic residue of historical bias"* (Junor 1997: 13).

While not all researchers agree with the depth of pessimism reflected in this comment, this thesis argues that this theme of vulnerability is pervasive, and exists even within writings and policy documentation in support of decentralisation. The notion of women being exposed to 'risks' in a bargaining-based environment is present even within current federal government rhetoric. The commitment to monitor the impact of enterprise bargaining on women (and other groups 'at risk' such as young workers and non-English speaking background workers) first emerged in the Labor government's *Industrial Relations Reform Act 1993*. This commitment has been maintained by the Federal Coalition, albeit in a reduced way (and as part of a negotiation process with the Democrats to ensure the legislation's passage through the Senate). It should be noted that other elements of Coalition policy reform do not indicate that the government perceives women to be 'vulnerable' in the context of a decentralised labour market. For example, the government has stripped away many features of industrial reform considered important for the protection of these workers (including reducing the amount

of allowable matters under the award, and reforms to unfair dismissal to allow employers to dismiss employees more easily). In addition, the government has also reduced funding set aside for monitoring purposes and abolished the Work and Family Unit in 2003. Nevertheless, the subtext of women as 'different' in their status as bargaining agents is evident within the government's ongoing commitment to monitor outcomes in the industrial arena. Other long time supporters of decentralisation, including commentator and academic Wooden (1997), also identifies that women are one of the few groups that remain vulnerable in an industrial system which places greater emphasis on bargaining at the workplace level, and more directly between employer and employee.

#### **2.4 Introducing the forms of vulnerability: exclusion or marginalisation**

This thesis argues that the major arguments about women and enterprise bargaining have been structured, or modelled, around workplace circumstances that might be described as 'worst case scenarios'. Based on this approach, researchers see little potential for women to either take advantage of any opportunities available in a bargaining-based industrial environment, nor use bargaining to ameliorate unfavourable working arrangements. There are two discernable themes, or assumptions, running through this stream of literature. One literature grounds its arguments in assumptions about women's *exclusion from* bargaining as the key reason for women's disadvantage. The other literature argues that women's interests will be *marginalised while within* the bargaining system, and that this in turn, will perpetuate disadvantage.

Industrial relations researchers have placed great emphasis on the vulnerability associated with women in the labour market. However, the characterisation of women generically as 'vulnerable', has in large part relied on studies of women in lower status and low pay occupations in the labour market. Researchers argue that women will be disadvantaged in an enterprise bargaining-based system, because the industrial environment is not one receptive to the involvement of women. It is argued that women will inevitably be excluded (overlooked and/or forgotten) in the bargaining

process. These conclusions are drawn by focusing on the key groups at risk of exclusion.

#### **2.4.1 The theme of exclusion**

One of the greatest inequities that researchers fear will be carried over into an enterprise bargaining-based system of industrial relations is the earnings gap between men and women workers (Burgmann 1994, Pratt 1992, Daly & Gregory 1992, Whitehouse 1992). It is argued that women are most likely to suffer exclusion from agreements in which large pay rises are won. These large pay rises, it is argued are most likely to occur in male dominated sectors, among the industrially strong and/or well unionised), so women will remain dependent on the award framework for pay rises. This is well documented by a large number of researchers (DIR 1996 & 1995b, Hammond & Harbridge 1995, Burgmann 1994, Lee 1994, Hall & Fruin 1993, Hill & Du Plessis 1993, Women's Electoral Lobby (WEL) 1992).

There is a large body of comparative research that points to a relationship between high income inequality between workers and the use of contractual-type (common-law) agreements between employers and employees (Preston and Crockett 1999; Isaac, Kates and Peetz 1993, Whitehouse 1992). While Wooden (1997) has been highly supportive of the Coalition's reform agenda to decentralise industrial relations, Wooden acknowledges that compulsory arbitration has compressed the difference between male and female earnings. Wooden demonstrates this argument through comparison of Australian earnings data with a range of enterprise bargaining-focused industrial regimes (Germany, France and Britain). This argument has been substantiated by evidence in New Zealand, where the income gap between men and women accelerated and widened after the introduction of the *Employment Contracts Act* (Hammond & Harbridge 1993).

Industrial relations researchers also note the 'risk' posed to women workers because of poor intersection or integration between the industrial framework and other legislative and policy frameworks. Probert (2001) notes the inability of the welfare framework in Australia to deal comprehensively with elements



of disadvantage that persist in the labour market. Baird, Brennan and Cutcher (2002) and Whitehouse (2001; 1992) note similar difficulties with the Australian policy framework, and the mismatch between industrial policy, social policy and appropriate legislative frameworks that might handle the range of constraints on women's labour market participation in an integrated way.

Many researchers and commentators have identified the pay gap as being the result of limited access by women to over-award payments (HREOC 1992). The literature is divided on whether workplace size, and the proportion of men employed at the workplace, correlates to the incidence of over-award payments. Studies such as Gill's (1994) show that over-award payments are more common in workplaces with greater numbers of male workers and where an active union has been part of a structured bargaining framework. In fact, it appears that a strong correlation exists between workplace size and over-awards with the larger the workplace, the higher the over-award payment. As agreement-focused work by Isaac, Kates and Peetz (1993) shows, the incidence of negotiated over-awards tends to decline as the size of the workplace declines.

As Frizzell (1992) shows, inequitable internal wage structures created by the payment of different over-award rates to different occupational groups have proven to be very difficult, historically, for the AIRC to address. The award restructuring process, which attempted to address classification structures and wage relativities based on skill, responsibility and working conditions have been undermined by over-award payments (Frizzell 1992). This greater dependence on the award framework among women, means that enterprise bargaining is likely to further compound already existing inequities in the determination of pay for men and women workers.

*"The inequities that are currently present in awards prior to the introduction of enterprise bargaining will not be rectified, but will simply be carried over to the new system to be continued, or worse, exacerbated" (Burgmann 1994).*



The maintenance of the award system in Australia has been argued by many researchers to have been critical to maintaining living standards for vulnerable and low paid workers. Awards have been particularly important for women workers in the past, and many researchers argue they still have an important role in preserving entitlements for women (ACIRRT 1999). It is the variation in pay rates and conditions, created by enterprise bargaining, that researchers are most fearful will disadvantage women precisely because of exclusion from agreements. In this scenario, researchers argue that it will be women who are most likely to 'fall through the cracks' by being excluded from agreements (Burgmann 1994). Researchers who advocate a continuing role for the award system suggest that enterprise bargaining places this system of preservation and protection for vulnerable workers at risk, because (as the federal legislation states) once an enterprise agreement is in place it overrides the conditions determined by the award (NWCC 1992). While the *Workplace Relations Act 1996* includes a provision for a 'no disadvantage' test, researchers have been less than confident in the ability of this provision to prevent inequities (that is, 'worst case scenarios) from unfolding for women. As Hall & Fruin (1993) demonstrate, awards were previously exempt from discrimination legislation, so therefore many aspects of employment have not been examined for indirect discrimination (Burgmann 1994). This leads researchers to conclude that enterprise bargaining will not offer women any opportunities to rectify existing structural discrimination.

As this review of findings shows, women under an enterprise bargaining based system face what might be described as a quandary or a negotiation 'catch 22'. As a number of researchers have noted, women are likely to achieve better outcomes in bargaining when a sense of 'collective logic' dominates (Whitehouse 1992: 83), yet, as other researchers note (Pocock 1995; Burgmann 1994) women face a number of challenges in seeking to mobilise union collective strength to serve their interests. The more industrially 'active' unions and occupations will be best equipped to negotiate for over-award payments with employers, and again, women have historically not been included in these highly active and militant processes. These unions tend to be attached to the male dominated industries, particularly blue collar ones, and

often have a process of negotiation established between the employer and the employee (Houston 1999). That is, a protocol for negotiation already exists (Pocock 1995). As Burgmann (1994) shows, this explains the degree of support that many male-dominated unions showed (initially, at least) for the introduction of enterprise bargaining in the late 1980s. These unions are not intimidated by negotiating with employers, and can see the potential benefits the system could deliver to them. This stands in contrast to female dominated unions and sectors which tend to be less experienced in negotiations (Boreham, Hall, Harley & Whitehouse 1996). The more competent and experienced negotiating unions and industries (male dominated) will be quicker to strike agreements, and will more astutely negotiate wage increases without trading off other entitlements (Gardner 1995; Burgmann 1994; Lee 1994).

Even when women workers are collectively represented in enterprise bargaining negotiations, researchers argue these women are still likely to feel the impact of exclusion in some sense. Unlike a centralised wage fixing system, enterprise bargaining creates a situation where stronger unions can negotiate improvements to pay and conditions that will benefit workers represented by these unions exclusively. In a centralised wage fixing system, their gains are spread to workers in weaker unions (ACIRRT 1999; Scutt 1992: 21). However, in a decentralised system the flow-on effects of these 'wins' cease to be felt by other groups of workers (Bennett 1995).

Researchers fear that the 'reward' based model of workplace negotiation and bargaining will not only reinforce or perpetuate the pay equity gap, but may actually exacerbate it. Again, these arguments rally around a theme of women's disadvantage through exclusion. Women workers are overwhelmingly located in industries where productivity improvements are more difficult to quantify (Boreham et al 1996; Gardner 1995). Women's over-representation in the sectors of education, health, and community services sectors are all commonly cited examples. Under enterprise bargaining, assessments of productivity have a pivotal role in the determination of pay outcomes, in particular, over-award payments. "*The*

*industries and occupations in which men dominate are also those in which output and productivity - the basis of enterprise bargaining - are easiest to quantify*" (NWCC 1992: 2). As Mac Dermott (1994) notes, the 'male' standard of work and 'productive work' is still used as the base measure, to which all work, whether performed by men or women, is expected to conform. The industrial strength of male dominated sectors, combined with more clearly defined output/productivity objectives in these sectors (manufacturing, building and construction, and mining) is argued to be a very powerful combination of factors through which men can leverage higher wage outcomes.

Women, and their over representation in white collar positions, means they will be excluded from the 'big gains' that might be delivered from bargaining. Junor, Barlow & Patterson (1993) show that 'output' can be much harder to quantify for some white collar workers, and therefore, these workers start negotiations from a 'back foot'. In addition, these industries are not regarded by the market to be 'central' or 'strategically important because they are community and service oriented and therefore 'peripheral' (Hammond 1994; Robertson 1992; NWCC 1992). These industries are also characterised by their low levels of unionisation and limited experience in bargaining (Burgmann 1994: 5, Gardner 1995, Callus et al 1991). Historically, larger workplaces with greater levels of union density tend to be those located in 'export-producing' sectors of the economy. In other words, these workplaces will experience two forms of industrial strength – union representation but also leverage to justify gains through bargaining because of their strategic importance to the economy.

However, there is recent evidence that indicates historical trends in union membership have turned on their heads. A report conducted by ACIRRT (2003) using unpublished Australian Bureau of Statistics (ABS) national statistics on trade union membership shows that membership, even in blue collar heartlands of unionism, has declined. In the five years to 2002, ACIRRT's research found that some areas of female membership have been more resilient than male membership. Growth in union membership among



women workers was found in teaching, nursing and among part time workers (observed as a market wide trend) (ACIRRT 2003).

There is strong evidence to suggest the low status and low pay occupations fare worst under enterprise bargaining, and that these unfavourable outcomes are attributable (in large part) to exclusion from bargaining. Researchers note that women in highly feminised occupational groups, located within male dominated industries (in which a male dominated union has significant influence), are at particularly high risk of exclusion. The case study-based analyses of Burgmann (1994), and Hammond & Harbridge's work in New Zealand (1995) argue that women experience outright omission from bargaining negotiations and as a result, the final enterprise agreement cannot reflect their needs as workers.

National surveys conducted by the Department of Industrial Relations (DIR) in the mid 1990s highlight similar problems for women, but again these problems are highlighted through use of a worst-case occupational scenario for women. This research found that women clerks, as an occupational group, were more likely than any other workers to be excluded from collective (certified) enterprise agreements (DIR 1996). The DIR Enterprise Bargaining Report conducted an extensive analysis of the Workplace Bargaining Survey (a national bargaining survey) and found that, of all occupations, clerks and sales and personal service workers were the most likely to be excluded from agreements, and that this occurred most frequently in the manufacturing sector (DIR 1995: 38-41).

A range of explanations is possible for this exclusion, but again, the methodological approach used by researchers does not allow the reasons for this gendered differential to be fully explored. It may reflect a split between the physical locations of work (factory and shopfloor versus off-site office location), with clerical workers being excluded because they are geographically separated from the majority of workers employed by a single firm. Many clerks have also, historically, been covered by state awards. The Enterprise Bargaining Report for 1995 was concerned with a fairly narrow



focus. That is, analysis of agreements covered within the jurisdiction of the federal legislation and federal awards alone. In other words, the generalisability of these findings has never been properly established.

Research has shown that female state award-covered employees, located within male dominated workplaces, are at particular risk of agreement exclusion of this kind. A high profile blue collar case, involving James Hardie Pipeline workers in South Australia, exposes this risk for women clerks. In the mid 1990s, the Australian Industrial Relations Commission found in favour of the clerical employees when it was found that the main blue collar union representing the majority of workers (both male and blue collar) had failed to include the women clerical workers on site (DIR 1995: 39).

Clerks, in particular, have featured as the occupational focus of a number of studies in order to expose the risks of 'exclusion' for women. Hammond and Harbridge (1995) show that in New Zealand, collective bargaining and union membership dropped significantly after the introduction of enterprise bargaining (collective bargaining dropped by 50% from 1991 to 1994). Most importantly, the biggest drop was recorded in occupations of low clerical skill, which were overwhelmingly dominated by young and female workers. Hill & du Plessis (1993) provide evidence to show that low status workers fare worst under an enterprise bargaining system. Their analysis of clerical workers found them to be one of the most disadvantaged groups. Clerks (mostly women) were found to experience the most severe declines in union membership, and were identified by the researchers to be 'least able' to articulate their needs in a bargaining process. Evidence presented by Short, Preston and Peetz (1994) and others (Rimmer 1991) also show that clerks face the risk of exclusion in a way that is exceptional when compared to other occupational groups.

The composition and high level of gender segmentation present within the Australian labour market means that the fears raised by these researchers for Australian women workers, may be well justified. Women are over represented in the low-status and low-pay occupations of the labour market,

this includes positions like clerks, salesworkers and service occupations. Current ABS Labour Force (2004) statistics show that women occupy more than three quarters of all clerk positions). Of all salesworkers, women make up two-thirds. Part time positions are also held, in the majority of cases, by women. The ABS (2004) reports that three quarters of all part time workers in Australia at the present time, are women. The OECD has long described Australia as being one of the most gender-segregated workforces in the world through its Working Party on the Role of Women in the Economy Research Papers series.

Industrial relations researchers in Australia have also explored the conceptual reasons why less skilled white collar workers (in the lower echelons of the occupational ladder) are particularly vulnerable to exclusion in an enterprise bargaining-based industrial environment. Women within these occupational groups are considered to be at additional risk. Being white collar positions, these workers are less likely to be unionised (Cooper 2000; Lansbury 1977), with women in these occupations even less likely to be unionised (Probert 2000b; Burgmann 1994). Researchers have documented the historical tendency for white collar unions in Australia to avoid political action, reject the strike-notion and be generally non-militant and less activist in their approach to negotiations with the employer (Hill 1982). This stands in contrast to the approach adopted by some of the large blue collar unions (Johnson and Johnson 1997). Therefore, these vulnerable employees will be less able to negotiate favourable deals for themselves through an enterprise bargaining process (Bennett 1995; Lee 1994; WEL 1992).

The undervaluing of women's skills, which has been documented by feminist researchers for thirty years, is also noted by industrial relations researchers as strong evidence demonstrating a heightened vulnerability among women in a decentralised environment. As Cox (1992) describes it, the 'undervaluing and misrecording' of feminised occupations. Unskilled workers are at the greatest risk under an enterprise bargaining because they are the most easily replaced, so therefore have the least bargaining power (Bennett 1995: 143).

Hammond's (1994) case study comparing the outcomes under enterprise



bargaining for retail workers versus motor mechanics, provides a good example of this. Hammond's work showed the 'unskilled' tend to have less 'clout', and tend to be less well-organised than the 'skilled'. As Bennett (1995) notes, this invariably leads to a strategic exclusion of women, and women's interests by men (who tend to drive the negotiating agenda for bargaining). *"In any enterprise, male workers are far more likely to occupy strategically important positions within both the enterprise and any enterprise committee. They will dominate any bargaining agenda advanced on behalf of workers"* (1995: 118). The peripheral status of women in the workplace, it is argued, makes it very difficult for gender issues to be incorporated into the bargaining process.

Early research on enterprise bargaining suggests that a range of features shared by part time workers make them particularly vulnerable to exclusion. In specific studies of part time work and enterprise bargaining, researchers have found some differential treatment given to full time, part time and casual workers in the agreement negotiation process (Junor 1997). This treatment has led, in a number of cases, to the outright exclusion of part timers from enterprise agreements. Unless the time and location of negotiations and consultation about negotiations are extremely flexible, part time workers will be unable to participate fully in the negotiation process because of the fewer hours they spend at the physical location of work (Loder 1992: 2). Short et al (1994) found that part time workers were much less likely to be covered by workplace wage agreements (14 per cent less likely than full time workers). In other words, part timers were excluded as a group, from the agreement covering the majority of workers at a work site. More recent research also emphasises that part time workers may be exposed to some specific risks in a decentralised industrial environment. Whitehouse's (2001) research uses unpublished ABS data to show a widening in the earnings between part time and full time workers, which would not otherwise be visible using highly aggregated data.

## 2.5 The theme of marginalisation

A second theme within the industrial relations literature on enterprise bargaining suggests that women will be vulnerable to marginalisation. These arguments suggest that women will be included in bargaining processes, but, the way in which this inclusion occurs will lead to detrimental outcomes for women. It is argued that women will be marginalised by both the process of bargaining (how the bargaining is undertaken) and by the content of agreements themselves (what is bargained for). It is argued that women will be marginalised by process because women will be less able to assert themselves and influence outcomes in enterprise agreements. Researchers also assume that women will be disadvantaged by the content of agreements because they will inherently seek different types of clauses (in particular, clauses that seek to achieve a better balance of work and family), and these priorities for content will not be shared by men. It is argued that, individually, women will be less strong and will be more vulnerable to employers directly marginalizing their needs for more family-friendly forms of working time and leave of absence from work. Collectively, researchers argue that women will be marginalised by the masculinist structures of the union movement.

Marginalisation can occur within a workplace, where a group of workers who are considered of lower skill level can be marginalised by the processes used by the dominant union to negotiate the agreement. Kelly's (1992) investigation of the confectionary industry found that women have faced financial undervaluation because their work was perceived as women's work. Kelly (1992) argues that this perception of women's role in the workplace has created a gender bias in a range of issues including over-award payments, career advancement, overtime and non-award entitlements. This demonstrates that "within" workplace factors could have a significant influence on determining women's access to bargaining negotiations, and that the enterprise bargaining process is unlikely to address these issues of disadvantage in pay equity and a range of other key workplace entitlements.

Women workers can also experience the impact of marginalisation 'between' unions, when female dominated unions are marginalised by their peripheral



position across the wider union movement. Burgmann elaborates (1994), as does Scutt (1992) by stating that even where women have a high involvement in union activity, their efforts are more likely to be structurally frustrated by participation in industrially 'weaker' (female-dominated) unions. It is not so much that women are inactive, but that the historically 'weaker' unions have not been able to achieve the same kinds of gains as the stronger and more male dominated unions.

The culture of unions, it is argued, has not historically proven to be receptive to the involvement of women. As Hallock describes "*For decades it seemed that unions either ignored women or discriminated against them*" (1997:45). In other words, unions participate in behaviours that marginalise the participation of women. It is argued that the very structures of the union are 'masculinist', and alienate the involvement of women workers (Shute 1994: 167; Henry & Franzway 1993). A range of surveys have established that women are under represented in union structure. Smith (1996) shows that women are under represented in union management positions, holding only 31 per cent of decision making positions and 29 per cent of union delegates. Callus et al (1991) show that 61 per cent of workers in the community services sector are women, yet they comprise only 49 per cent of all delegates (1991). Loder also applies this argument by showing that 11 per cent of union officials are women (1992: 4). These researchers would suggest that women do not lack interest or enthusiasm in the negotiation process, but that women face similar 'glass ceiling' issues in the union movement as they do in other organisations (Franzway 1999; Pocock 1995; Burgmann 1994; Scutt 1992).

Researchers also argue that issues that are likely to be the priority for many women, including the need to remedy a mismatch between working time and home life, are likely to be marginal to many industrial campaigns. The breadth of issues that need to be addressed within any enterprise agreement can be extremely broad and varied (from superannuation, retrenchment packages through to the timing and placement of tea breaks). Family-friendly clauses are only one of many possible concerns to be negotiated in the context of an industrial campaign, and these are unlikely to be a main priority for

many male dominated unions (Probert, Ewer & Whiting 2000b). Other researchers note that marginalisation of family-friendly issues can occur, even when there are attempts to embrace aspects of this agenda. Houston's (1996) case study of the maritime industry found that women continued to experience the affects of profound problems with their enterprise agreement (poor hours arrangements), despite a concerted attempt by the male dominated union to embrace family-friendly clauses and address direct discrimination for women.

This thesis is also relevant to a wider body of research that deals with gender socialisation and expectations about the way in which women engage with, and bargain, in order to obtain workplace outcomes that will be most beneficial. This assumption persists, even in an environment in which the processes of bargaining themselves are still not well understood or critiqued by the literature (Fells 1995). There is certainly a strong body of scholarship that argues that women are socialised to be less confident, are often self-sacrificing, and operate on an 'emotional' rather than rational level (Collinson & Hearn 1996; Beutel and Marini 1995; Johnson 1993; Dion 1985; Gilligan 1982). As Lagan puts it, a certain type of value system is required for employees to successfully bargain, and this value system is not actively encouraged in women (1994: 37). Hammond & Harbridge (1995) and Junor (1996) note, in order for women to negotiate effectively they will need to overcome a lifetime of socialisation that has discouraged assertiveness and ambition. As Burgmann (1994) notes, this may be extremely difficult for women, particularly given the 'masculine' culture characterising many unions.

Alcorso & Hage, in their work on enterprise bargaining and women from non-English speaking backgrounds describe the behaviour as a 'socialisation to altruism' (1994:4). This 'socialisation to altruism' is argued by many authors to be the reason why women workers have appeared to fare better under systems which encourage collective bargaining, not individual bargaining (Junor 1997). Although there is some debate about the *degree* of influence of gender socialisation on women's participation in enterprise bargaining, it is quoted by many researchers as being a significant impediment to women achieving equitable outcomes under enterprise bargaining.

*“Bargaining has historically been the domain of males, the language is masculinist, the processes are adversarial and its concepts have been based on gendered notions of workers being full time, male bread winners. These processes have, for the most part, treated women as outsiders and are unfamiliar to many women workers”*  
(Hammond & Harbridge 1993: 17).

While many researchers expose the risks for women, others do see some potential for women to overcome this marginalisation by being aware and active in bargaining. Lee (1994) for example, likens the introduction of enterprise bargaining to a ‘modern corset’. However, Lee is positive about the factors of personal motivation and assertion, which she argues are under the control of individual women workers.

*“Unfortunately changes to societal attitudes and cultures cannot be enforced or legislated, but the current high degree of general awareness of the issues facing women will go some way to loosening the constraints of these corsets”* (Lee 1994: 197).

There is a body of research that suggests that there may be some latent opportunities for women to take advantage of the newer more flexible workplace environment. Certainly, the statistical evidence on whether female dominated workplaces are less likely to engage in bargaining is not conclusive. The most comprehensive reports conducted to date, relying on national government survey data, have found female dominated workplaces no less likely to engage in pay bargaining than male dominated workplaces (DIR 1994: 48). In fact, the 1995 national data results showed that female dominated industries were highly likely to engage in bargaining, and with industries such as health and community services experiences significant growth in enterprise bargaining (DIR 1995).

The rhetoric of governments that have led the reform agenda on enterprise bargaining, and among some women’s lobby groups, suggests that bargaining represents a latent opportunity for women. These views place household and family priorities at the core of women’s marginalisation from the mainstream bargaining agenda. At the time of the introduction of the *Workplace Relations*



*Act*, the (then) Federal Minister for Industrial Relations, Peter Reith, stated that a significant benefit to derive from the new bargaining environment would be the opportunities for women to introduce a wider range of issues which were more relevant to women's experience in the labour market, and thereby undermine the 'masculinist' trade union power structure (1996: 15). This line has changed little over the course of the last eight years of government policy statements. Analysis of press releases, speeches and official budget statements released by the Commonwealth Office of the Status of Women (OSW) maintains that a bargaining-based industrial environment offers superior opportunities for women to bargain for change for more flexible hours (OSW 1996) to expand the range of jobs governed by a part time work arrangement (OSW 1997) and most recently to provide women opportunity to bargain for a more diverse range of hours arrangements and satisfy a wider range of household/working life compromises (OSW 2002).

The inference that a more decentralised bargaining framework offers opportunities for women to re-instate a balance of responsibilities between household and work is also strong among lobbyists for women's rights. In the mid to late 1990s the Australian Federation of Business and Professional Women (AFBPW) has been highly vocal on the issue of bargaining. In a public document, that was widely circulated to women workers and members of the society they characterise enterprise bargaining as a snakes and ladders game, with women having the potential to emerge the 'winners' of the game.

*"The ladders are the very real opportunities to improve your pay, your career path, your working conditions, your skills, your long-term job safety, your ability to balance work and family commitments... in short your job satisfaction... You certainly don't need to be any kind of expert to voice your opinions on how your workplace could be improved"* (AFBPW 2000:1).

Similarly, statements by the Federal Sex Discrimination Commissioner Pru Goward also demonstrate how the household and the need to balance work and family is the primary motivation behind women's preferences. In launching a major research project on a better balance of work and family, she stated *"We cannot continue to agitate about inequality between men and*



*women in the workplace when many of its seeds are sown in the home”*  
(Goward 2004).

## **2.6 ‘Family-first’ among women’s enterprise agreement preferences?**

Researchers argue that women’s preferences in their enterprise agreements will be driven primarily by the need to seek remedy for the time imbalance they experience between the realms of home and paid work (Pocock 2005). The assertion that women are driven by a working time imperative that is fundamentally different to men, is a primary assumption of much literature on this topic. It is widely assumed by the literature that women will benefit most from enterprise agreements that can achieve an ‘optimal’ balance between work and family.

Certainly, there is a strong statistical case that women undertake a greater burden of unpaid household and caring responsibilities. Bittman’s analysis of ABS unpaid and paid (time series) labour force data shows that the hours of unpaid work performed by women remains higher than the unpaid work performed by men (Bittman 1997; 1996; 1994; 1992). The greater unpaid work load is maintained by women, even in households where both women and men (partners) are engaged in full time work (Baxter 2000; Bittman & Pixley 1997).

There is also overwhelming evidence that negotiations within households (in particular, how unpaid work responsibilities will be shared between men and women) are critical to shaping women’s labour force participation. As Morehead (2003) shows through the analysis of ABS labour force data, women’s labour force participation closely follows the life-course of women. Morehead notes that within the ‘child-bearing zone’ (people aged 25 to 44 years), the participation of women in paid work drops, while men’s labour force participation reaches its greatest peak (2003: 4). Similarly, working time preferences among men and women also appear to be affected by the ‘child bearing zone’. For men aged 25 to 54 years, a high proportion of men work full time without much variation in the levels of full time work across these different age groups. The labour force participation patterns of women are

markedly different however, with a significant drop in women's full time labour force participation across the age bands most likely to be involved in child rearing (Morehead 2003: 5).

In fact, literature exploring equity in working arrangements and entitlements (and hence bargaining) is framed almost entirely by understandings as to how these arrangements are shaped and derived from the needs of the household. Theories that consider women's bargaining and negotiating power have tended to focus exclusively on negotiation between husband and wife and how this power exists within the home (Strober & Chan 1998; Cherry 1998; Agarwal 1997) or alternatively how occupational sex segregation emerges from conditions at home (Neuman 1991). A number of theories pertaining to women's ability to achieve promotion are also grounded in tensions arising from the work-family imbalance. As Wright, Baxter and Birkelund (1995) note, these theories can relate to women 'self-selecting' and choosing not to engage or assert in the workplace because of family responsibilities, or because women face institutional constraints with regard to child care.

This thesis does not seek to dispute the weight of evidence that the household is critical to explanations for the degree and manner of women's labour force participation. However, this thesis argues that literature also points to the dangers of assuming that women's workplace decisions, career choices and behaviours are pre-eminently decisions about home and family. As Liff and Ward (2001) have described this approach as, "*a serious limitation of analyses*".

#### **2.6.1 Lack of definitional consensus**

Firstly, there is currently no consensus on what represents an 'optimal' balance between work and home life, and in fact these discussions represent one of the most contentious issues across the literatures of sociology, health, family and gender studies. Research on women's preferences for working time arrangements reflects the diversity in women's experiences and choices, and demonstrate how these choices can be affected by a wide range of factors including occupational position, degree of financial stability in the home,

class, value system and parenting ideology (Morehead 2003; Hakim 2000; Baxter 2000). Werbel (1998) notes that women and men make labour market choices in a way that minimises role conflict between unpaid caring and the responsibilities of paid work, and other research (Morehead 2003), notes that these decisions are guided by different and underlying value systems and parenting ideologies among women. However, there is not consensus among researchers as to what the key elements driving choice are.

Likewise, the representation of an 'ideal' set of working arrangements and enterprise agreement provisions for the balance of work and family remains far from agreed, and the methodological approaches currently applied by leading agencies could not be more stark. Since the early 1990s, debates surrounding women and enterprise bargaining have been dominated by (what is popularly termed) the 'juggle of work and family'. Researchers argue that, since primary care and unpaid work roles are still predominantly undertaken by women, the content of enterprise agreements must directly reflect or allow for women workers to accommodate these dual roles, otherwise women will inevitably be disadvantaged. In the view of organizations such as ACIRRT at the University of Sydney, it is important that the presence of family-friendly provisions is not overestimated. ACIRRT maintains the largest, independently maintained databases of certified agreements in Australia, so its annual reporting on agreement outcomes represents an important view which is independent of government. In ACIRRT's annual reports on agreement outcomes, the organisation applies a narrow set of criteria in order to assess whether an agreement meets the standard of 'family-friendly'. The primary measures used are the introduction of leave that can be specifically used to care for family members (carers', family, paid and unpaid parental, paid and unpaid maternity, paternity leave are some examples), and the provision of facilities that directly aid parents in the care of children (breastfeeding facilities, carers' rooms, on-site child care, subsidies for child care payments). ACIRRT has reported estimates of family-friendly agreements as running at low as 12 per cent of all agreements. In contrast, the Department of Workplace Relations uses less specific criteria in assessments to ascertain family-friendly status. The department includes enterprise agreement clauses



that contain any reference to 'flexibility in hours' in counts to ascertain 'family-friendly' agreement outcomes. Consequently, the department's estimates of 'family-friendly' agreements as a proportion of all agreements to be over 80 per cent. In both of these cases, the criteria used to assess family friendliness have not been formed as a result of any comprehensive preference analysis of men and women workers, nor did either party consult with workers directly in order to test the appropriateness of the criteria applied.

In case-study based research, the ambiguities associated with defining a family friendly clauses become more pronounced (Probert, Whiting and Ewer 2000b; Charlesworth 1997; Sayers 1993). In the case of enterprise agreements which contain clauses to introduce a compressed working week (which employer bodies and governments have promoted as advantageous for women) Loder (1992) finds these arrangement unsustainable for part time workers. Probert's (2000a) work in the finance sector found increased flexibility in hours, but also expansion in hours and decreases in penalties and loadings which have traditionally been highly valued by lower paid clerks (predominantly women).

Some researchers have been highly critical of this assumption that family-friendly agreements are synonymous with woman-friendly agreements because they emphasise and define women's experience by 'difference'. Pocock (1997) describes it in the following way, suggesting that to study women in industrial terms has become synonymous with the study of difference or aberration. As Pocock notes "*the commitment to making gender visible rests on the assumption that women have gender-specific needs, different ways of organizing, different expectations and different priorities*" (1997: 5).

The assumption that women (generically) benefit from some form of family-friendly clause is flawed for a number of reasons. A major reason being that, even among working parents, preferences for how to manage and prioritise dual roles of paid and unpaid worker can vary widely. Glezer & Wolcott (1997) for example, note that preferences for working hours among working parents vary depending on the age of children and the age of parents.

Rothausen (1999) shows that surveys of employees preferences for family-friendly working arrangements, often use the 'family' as the unit of analysis but preferences of workers themselves are not considered. As Thornthwaite notes "*Men's preferences have been considered in terms of their status as parents, whereas women are considered as mothers or carers or not at all*" (2001: 10).

### **2.6.2 Lack of preference data generally**

A further difficulty associated with surveys that have sought to collect data on worker or employer preferences in their working arrangements and entitlements, have not provided the additional survey items necessary to enable analysis of enterprise bargaining outcomes. The Australian Workplace Industrial Relations Survey (AWIRS) of 1990 and 1995, and the British Workplace Industrial Relations Survey both sought to capture attitudinal data on the impact of workplace change (from the point of view of both workers and employers). The Household, Income and Labour Dynamics Survey (HILDA) also seeks to give greater insight to preferences, however analysis of the impact of specific bargaining arrangements is not possible because the survey does not include specific information about the form of employment contract under which the interviewee is covered, so therefore is not suitable to give greater insight to employee preferences in bargaining.

Where preferences for 'family-oriented' benefits are weighed against other choices and agreement priorities, there is evidence that family concerns are not always pre-eminent among the preferences of women (or men). A recent international study of more than 13 000 unionised workers across more than twenty countries, found that family-oriented benefits were not considered highest among the priorities of any workers. The study argued that when family-specific preferences were considered in the context of all preferences sought by employees, the family-specific preferences were not among the greatest or highest of all bargaining priorities (ICFTU 2001).

2.6.3 Preference data not used directly to inform conclusions

Secondly, much bargaining research has not been informed directly by actual preference data (of either men or women) so many of these ‘family-first’ assumptions remain untested empirically. There remains a dearth of data actually documenting the breadth of preferences (among both men and women) with regard to their working arrangements. While the ABS does capture some data pertaining to worker’s hours preferences (the desire for more versus the desire for less hours), the survey does not capture this data for employees on a wide range of employment contracts. The ABS Earnings and Hours survey, for example, provides analysis according to broad forms of employment (whether the worker has access to paid leave entitlements), but does not readily publish information about sub-populations and preferences. Data provided through the HILDA also gives insight to the picture of preferences in hours. However, like the ABS data, HILDA does not provide insight to the rationale or the motivation for the preference given, and whether this preference is shaped by forces primarily emerging from the home, or from work, or a combination of both priorities. HILDA does include questions dealing with worker preferences for a range of hours arrangements at work. Again, the HILDA data on preferences supports the hypothesis that the household is critical to the formation of labour market preferences of women, however, it also raises some issues worthy of further exploration.

**Table 4            HILDA Average working hours and preferred working hours<sup>2</sup>**

	Typical weekly working hours	Weekly hours preferred
Men	47.5	38.5
Women	33.4	30.7
Women with dependants	30.2	28.6
Women without dependants	36.6	32.5
All	40.1	34.9

<sup>2</sup> It should be noted these figures include all labour market participants including contractors, self employed, and full time and part time employees (casual and permanent) in their calculations.



Table 4 includes data provided at an ACIRRT seminar, by researcher Van Wanrooy (2004). As table 4 shows, men typically work longer hours than women (47.5 hours per week for men, compared to 33.4 hours for women). The impact of the responsibilities associated with caring for children on women's labour force participation is also evident. Weekly hours of paid work are lowest for women with children (just over 30 hours per week). The lowest hours preference recorded is also found within this group of women (just over 28 hours per week). The table also shows the greatest difference between the hours preferences of women with children, compared to women without children. Women without children typically worked more than 36 hours per week. Interestingly, these figures give weight to the need for greater exploration of factors other than those directly relating to child care as a primary explanation for working time preferences. While women without children expressed an hours preference (32.5) that was much higher than women with children (28.5), these women (who did not have the burden of child care responsibilities) also would clearly prefer to be working less hours on a weekly basis. The reason for this difference is not clear, however it suggests preference diversity among women which cannot be explained by current theories associated with unpaid work.

Thornthwaite (2001) notes the dearth of data and understanding with regard to actual preferences in enterprise agreements, and the wide degree of assumptions with regard to preferences as they currently exist for both men and women. Others note that broader changes in the labour market (longer hours, erosion of permanency in employment) have had a far more profound influence over the ability of workers to balance caring responsibilities than have any specific enterprise agreement clauses, however well-crafted (Probert 2000a; ACIRRT 1999). This is highly significant to understanding enterprise agreement preferences because it demonstrates that worker preferences in agreements are not being evaluated and understood within the wider institutional, workplace and personal context in which they are formed. While many industrial campaigns have been geared to embrace more aspects of the family-friendly debate over the last ten years, researchers remain critical of

how beneficial these shifts have been, in reality, for the majority of women workers (Charlesworth 1996). It is also important to note that while understanding of the full range of women's preferences with regard to family-specific clauses remains opaque, men's preferences remain largely invisible within the literature. Some exceptions to this include work by Morehead (2003) and Levine and Pittinsky (1997).

Where preferences have been directly used to inform workplace agreement analysis, the lack of uniformity in preferences among women is striking. Sheridan & Conway's (2001) research shows a lack of uniformity in preferences for part time work. The most extreme chasm was found between employer preferences for part time work (motivated by numerical and functional flexibility requirements of business), and employee preferences (motivated by flexibility most suited to work/family balance). Canadian research on part time work also notes that workers can have a range of different preferences within a general preference for shorter working hours. Hogarth, Hasluck, Pierre, Winterbotham and Vivien's (2000) work for example, found that when the 'preference to work from home' was explored more deeply by the research, most workers nominated the desire to work from home to be associated with efficiency reasons not a better balance of work and family. Houston's (1996) case study research, for example, notes that women and men may have very different expectations for their enterprise agreements, and that this, in turn will shape their view in evaluating their level of satisfaction with the outcomes finally achieved under the agreement. *"This finding [women reporting a higher level of satisfaction with the agreement] suggest that female employees may have expected much less from the agreement, or conversely that male employees had much higher expectations"* (Houston 1996: 134). Higgins, Duxbury and Johnson (2000) note that women indicating a preference for part time work can be motivated by two main reasons – workers who are seeking a break from children ('career' workers) or workers who are seeking to spend more time with children ('earner' workers). This suggests that the diversity within family-specific preferences is not given particular emphasis by research. It also suggests that workplace-based factors

also influence enterprise agreement preferences, and that these factors remain largely unexplored by research.

## **2.7 Occupational dimension left unexplored**

This thesis does not reject the validity of the arguments surrounding women in low status positions in the labour force, however, researchers have not focused on women in occupations who do not fit into the low-status and low-pay category. Therefore there is little understanding of the (possibly) differential results to emerge from enterprise bargaining for women workers. This means that the above hypotheses about women in low status positions have not been tested to see if they can be applied to women in other occupations, who (arguably) have more power and experience in negotiating techniques than women who are less skilled and less powerful. One piece of research has been published in Australia which specifically pays attention to managers, professionals and self-employed women. Still & Mortimer (1995) distributed a pilot questionnaire to 45 managers across the public, private and self employed sectors. Their research begins with an acceptance of the major arguments surrounding women's disadvantage in an enterprise bargaining system (including decentralised productivity bargaining and Equal Employment Opportunity (EEO) and discrimination). The small size of the sample means that the results of the analysis are not conclusive, however Still and Mortimer did find some interesting results. Most of the managerial women interviewed did not demonstrate a well-developed understanding of the enterprise bargaining process. The women interviewed could quote the rhetoric surrounding enterprise bargaining efficiently, but their understanding beyond this appeared shallow. The study also found significant differences between the public and private sectors for these occupations. The public sector women interviewed demonstrated a much better understanding of the issues involved and participated actively in the bargaining process. The self-employed women did not see the enterprise bargaining process as relevant to their businesses, and the private sector women did not appear to fully comprehend the benefits/disadvantages of the system and their role in it. As Still & Mortimer conclude: *"While it is still too early to conclusively state that enterprise bargaining does impact managerial women differentially, the*



*public sector women suggest that, as expected, they are the least vulnerable group*" (1995: 18).

Similar research was carried out in New Zealand by Mc Gregor & Tremaine (1995). The study was based on short interviews with ten managerial women to discover their experiences in negotiating their employment packages. The results are not comprehensive, however they are significant because they focus on occupation as the key feature of the analysis. The research emphasises the importance of gaining qualitative information about women's actual experiences with workplace negotiations. Interestingly, seven out of the ten women interviewed were pleased with the outcome of their negotiations, despite their attitude to the process appearing 'reactive' rather than proactive and that they tended to devalue their contribution to the workplace. This suggests that women in very high powered positions also suffer a form of disadvantage, which is different (but similar in some respects) to women in low pay and low status positions (McGregor & Tremaine 1995: 20). *"This reflects the legacy of structural inequalities in work and the psychological impact on women, even at the top, who have been encouraged over time to undervalue themselves"* (McGregor & Tremaine 1995: 20).

Studies of workplace culture, particularly management culture, have been effective in highlighting that women do not always behave in a homogeneous way in their reactions to patriarchal aspects of workplace structure. Again, preliminary investigations of worker preferences also suggest that this too, may have an occupational dimension that is worthy of exploration. *"Women are much more likely to cite family obligations as their reasons for choosing these types of work arrangements (shorter hours or part time work), although motivations may differ by occupations"* (Thornthwaite 2001). There is also a need to consider the culture of the workplace as exerting significant influence on the formation of agreement preferences. Research by Spalten-Roth & Kalleberg (1997) notes that women are more likely than men to cite family concerns as their reason for nominating preferences for working arrangements, however, the occupational or work circumstances of women define and fundamentally shape the way in which preferences about these working

arrangements are expressed. Alexander & Frank's (1990) work in the banking sector shows that workplace culture is one of the most important elements in understanding how workers access entitlements. Their study of part time employees found that despite an extensive provision for part time employees to develop a career path, they found that without the support from personnel, the clause amounted to little more than a token effort on the part of employers. Research by Probert, Whiting and Ewer (2000) & Junor (1993) argues that the circumstances under which an actual clause is required to operate, are critical to interpretations of bargaining outcomes. Both of these pieces of research discuss part time work and suggest that the scope of the entitlement laid down by the agreement does not even closely match the reality for women workers. Junor (1993), in her study, describes part time work as a "low wage ghetto" (1993). Probert describes part time work in the context of her workplace case study in banking as inherently "unfriendly to family" (2000a: 13). Even assuming that men and women do bring inherently different views to the bargaining experience, industrial relations researchers in this field have not, however, attempted to draw on other fields of research (such as management or organisational studies) to explore *how* this difference manifests. Wajcman (1998) for example, explores how men and women behave differently as managers in an organization. Wajcman's research looks beyond the distinction of women as primary care givers, to consider how women react and behave differently as managers (not as workers with family responsibilities).

Researchers also note that the decision-making environment in which women must make preferences and decisions about enterprise agreements, is not well understood. Preliminary research in this field suggests that it is important to consider the occupational location of women, in considering formation of preferences. This does not discount that women in higher and lower status occupations both face issues of discrimination in the workplace, rather, it acknowledges that the constraints and issues may be different for different groups of women. Pascall, Parker and Evett's study of women managers notes this "*women make choices – albeit constrained ones – and they develop creative strategies to contain risks and costs, to advance their careers, to*

*develop alternatives and make the best fit between competing objectives”*  
(Pascall et al 2000: 66).

Researchers do acknowledge that the culture of the workplace influences the ability of employees to access entitlements that exist within enterprise agreements. Much of this research has focused on the limitations and constraints that a highly competitive workplace culture can place on women's ability to access agreement entitlements. Within enterprise agreement analysis this is often notionally described as the 'take up rate' or the 'take up factor' (Probert et al 2000a).

While not a strong emphasis of research, men's preferences have been considered by some analyses. Researchers have found that men face a similar set of working time dilemmas and face similar problems in accessing entitlements that might ease these conflicts. Surveys conducted with working fathers point to a large proportion of workplaces with highly unfavourable cultures to men taking time off to spend with family. Research conducted by Bittman, Hoffman & Thomson (2003) argues that a large proportion of men in the labour market now have access to some form of family-friendly leave provision under their workplace agreement (for example, parental or paternal leave) yet, the take up rate for these provisions among men remains extremely low. The wider body of statistical evidence about men and work and family, suggests that this low take up rate among men is not explained by a high level of satisfaction among men toward their current work-life balance. There is strong statistical evidence that men are highly dissatisfied with the balance of work and family arrangements. A study commissioned by the Department of Family and Community Services found that men in the paid labour force were highly dissatisfied with their ability to devote time to partners and family under their current working arrangements (Russell, Barclay, Edgecombe, Donovan, Habib, Callaghan & Pawson 1999). The survey data on which this study relied showed that 68 per cent of fathers were dissatisfied with their current working time arrangements. This dissatisfaction stemmed from the fact that their current positions did not permit them, as fathers, to spend sufficient time with their children. More than half of all the fathers surveyed



overall saw an undesirable balance between their family and working lives (Russell et al 1999). Research on work and family however, has focused primarily on women's responses to this undesirable work-life balance. To date, the responses of men toward this work-family crisis have been largely ignored.

## **2.8 Impact of wider labour market change on worker perspectives on bargaining**

The transformation of the workplace from an older style of capitalism to a newer style of capitalism has been well documented by researchers (ACIRRT 1999, Sennett 1998). The impact of this transformation at the level of individual agency has also been a growing area of inquiry in the last ten years (Wajcman and Martin 2004 and 2002; Giddens 1994). The current debate on women and enterprise bargaining, has not sought to explore these changes in depth, nor has the debate addressed specifically how these changes have impacted on employer and employee perceptions of the employment contract. This thesis argues that this exploration is potentially pivotal for future bargaining research because it exposes the shifting expectations associated with work and career. Researchers have noted that norms associated with working time have changed (ACIRRT 1999, Heiler 1995) but also the norms associated with employment tenure and contract too, have altered (Campbell 2000). These shifting expectations have affected the expectations and aspirations that workers bring to their enterprise agreements, however, this has not been explored by the debate so far.

It is also important to note that the emergence of new forms of career, in particular the 'protean career' (Hall and Moss 1998) have been identified as potentially beneficial for women. For example, it is argued that women are more flexible and more adaptable to workplace change (Atkinson 2002; Perrin Moore 2000), and so may be able to lever more advantageous workplace outcomes (more flexible forms of working time and more compatible family-work regimes). The degree to which women have been able to capitalise on, or use this reputed advantage, has not been explored or considered by bargaining research.

## 2.9 Methodological necessity to move beyond clause frequency analysis

Statistical analysis which relies on clause or provision incidence has been highly valued by researchers in determining the level of family-friendliness attached to an agreement (DEWR 2004; ACIRRT 2004). There is growing evidence however, that analysis of clause content alone is not sufficient, because ‘what you see is not necessarily what you get’ with regard to enterprise bargaining outcomes. Much debate has focused on the crafting of clauses and level of innovation attached to a clause. In other words, the level of innovativeness attached to the clause has been interpreted as a particular positive step. However, as other researchers note (Morehead 2003; ACIRRT 1999) this research technique fails to reflect the diversity of working time preferences for both women and men, and their independent needs as carers and parents. A growing concern voiced within this debate also highlights managerial prerogative and its power in shaping worker access to entitlements (Winfield and Rushing 2005). In other words, a ‘take up’ rate is important in understanding whether family-friendly outcomes achieved under bargaining are ‘real’ for the workers covered by particular agreements (Whitehouse 2001). Thornthwaite (2001) argues that a more accurate account of worker preferences, could be used to enhance the gap between on-paper entitlement, and the ‘lived reality’ of workers. Thornthwaite makes a distinction between the preferences (stated) and use of existing policies. *“to the extent that utilisation reflects the adequacy or inadequacy of existing benefits, the correlation of stated preferences and levels of use may indicate the nature of the shortfall, and hence, provide an indication of the real preferences of employees”* (Thornthwaite 2001: 5).

Beneath this analysis is the acknowledgement that the workplace mediates and moderates the outcomes of bargaining. Winfield & Rushing’s (2005) research shows that understanding an ‘outcome’ to emerge from an enterprise agreement is more than just understanding the stated rights and entitlements. The workplace environment is critical in shaping worker access to, and perception of, an entitlement. The gap between the rise of family-friendly policy, and unfriendly workplace reality, is noted by researchers such as

Hochschild (1997). In other case study-based research, researchers note the importance of culture as being the most important factor in understanding the impact of family-friendly work environments. The notion of 'employee-supervisor homophily' is noted by some to be the most critical factor in the intersection of work and family life. Winfield & Rushing (2005) develop this term to describe the type of supervisor-subordinate work relationships most likely to give workers consistent access to leave for family reasons. Other researchers note the difference between policy and 'lived' workplace culture. Cockburn (1991) argues that the presence of an equal opportunity policy does not prevent discrimination from occurring, and other workplace practices emerge to reinforce disadvantage for women in other ways. Houston's words give a powerful account of the influence of workplace-level factors including culture, in shaping women's experience of bargaining. *"Culture, therefore, may constitute a large proportion of the reason for women's lack of involvement with the bargaining process and satisfaction with the outcome"* (1996: 134).

## **2.10 Organisational research on gender not broached**

Looking beyond industrial relations research offers the opportunity to develop a further level of insight to the exploration of outcomes for women under an enterprise bargaining system. A wide and extensive body of research has been building for some thirty years documenting the ways in which men can actively discriminate against women, and behave in ways to marginalise the interests of women in the workplace. A most overt form of this type of power is applied is through the use of sexual harassment (Wirth 2001). Other marginalizing behaviours have also been observed in studies of men at work. Gambla & Kleiner's (2001) recent study of the 'old boys network' documents its continued presence. The glass ceiling is a term used widely in the UK, US and Australia (Durbin 2002), sticky floors has been used in Australian research (Still 1997) and in the UK, researchers have described a 'pyramidal crystal maze' (Pascall et al 2000). Guy (1994) uses the term 'organisational architecture' as the way to describe women's marginalisation from the formal structures of promotion and career path.



These masculinist behaviours have been observed strongly in male dominated industries and sectors (Ranson 2001; Collinson 1996), but also across organizations and observable through workplace practices or 'masculinist organisational practices' (Whitehead 2001) and within occupational bands. Researchers note how this marginalisation is pervasive and can permeate even professional and highly skilled occupations. While women are not excluded outright from these occupations, researchers argue that the marginalisation of women persists but simply in a different form. For example, the work of Durbin (2002) and Gherhardi (2000) show how women's opportunities in managerial positions has often only occurred in certain pockets and in marginal spheres of the managerial stream. Crompton & Sanderson (1990) consider the high level of sex segregation among professionals including banking, and teachers. While these women may gain entry to these positions, they are still denied similar career progression commensurate as a man. Still (1997) uses the term 'marginal executives' in her research on women in the advertising industry. This research highlights the acceptance of women as managers, but only if they remain peripheral to the interests of more central management. Osterman (1996) notes the importance of understanding established bureaucratic practices and how these prove to be an obstacle for women trying to climb the corporate ladder. Others note that even upon achievement of managerial promotion, women often struggle to 'gain acceptance' (Durbin 2002). Savage (1992) argues that women, even once they gain a foothold into managerial positions, their positions are often characterised and regarded as having a lower level of skill.

Other researchers, such as Connell (2003) note the dominance of men, yet the different masculinities that are maintained within this dominance. Connell notes the "*struggles for hegemony occur between groups of men who embody different masculinities and are bearers of different gender strategies*" (2003: 371). In the context of organizational research, Connell notes a major difference is evident between neo-liberal management strategies, and what have been termed the old style bureaucratic management strategies (Connell 2003: 372).

The literature on masculinity at work also notes the different strategies used by men both as individuals, and collectively, which work to perpetuate the marginalisation of women. Individual strategies might include sexual harassment in which men work to wield power over women (Wajcman 1998). Alternatively, there are arguments that men work collectively to discriminate against and exclude women. As Halford & Leonard (2001) note, this can occur in language, attitudes, beliefs and value systems, even styles of management can all be used by men to exclude and discriminate against women in institutional and organisational settings.

The emphasis given to organisational structure and 'hidden' processes of interaction within this feminist literature provides some important insights for the area of enterprise bargaining research. The scholarship on women in the professions demonstrates that these women can also be vulnerable to marginalisation (albeit of different forms). This pinpoints a significant gap in the enterprise bargaining case studies that have been conducted by the literature on this topic in the past. The hidden processes and engagements between men and women may reveal much about the way in which marginalisation actually occurs, and these remain, in large part, unexplored. The resistance of men, against women, is implied, but not particularly well explored. The research has not explored the scenarios that might unfold for women that are *prima facie* included, but continue to remain marginal and peripheral to central bargaining agendas.

Organisational culture research highlights that women do not necessarily respond in an homogeneous way to the challenges posed by a masculinist workplace, despite the acceptance that disadvantage for women may manifest in very similar ways. As Whitehead notes, in case study based research on organisational culture "*arising out of feminist enquiry has been the developing appreciation that women's responses to the gendered dynamics of organisational life are not uniform, static or predictable*" (2001: 87). This observation is highly relevant to women and enterprise bargaining research because it shows that professional and managerial women face a unique set of bargaining challenges. It is possible that women will face a 'double whammy'

of increasing managerial prerogative, and the challenge of male hegemony. These 'hegemonic' behaviours have been particularly found to exist among men who are intent on guarding their positions of power within a workplace (that is, among male managers) (Connell 2003).

## **2.11 Conclusion**

This review has identified that enterprise bargaining holds a number of potential risks for women workers. Researchers have identified that women are at risk of being significantly disadvantaged because of biases inherent to the industrial relations system. Two separate assumptions underlie the field of enterprise bargaining research and women. Firstly, it is argued that women will be disadvantaged because of their exclusion from bargaining processes. In effect, women will be 'left behind' or omitted from enterprise agreements that deliver a range of improvements to working arrangements and significant wage increases to male dominated industries. Secondly, it is argued that women will be included in bargaining processes, but their interests will ultimately be marginalised. Much of this discussion focuses on a presumption that women's preferences in agreements will be primarily formed by 'family concerns' and that these issues will not be a priority for enterprise agreements. While this thesis does not seek to reject these scenarios, and supports these hypotheses for women in highly vulnerable sectors of the labour market, a number of gaps do exist. While this thesis acknowledges the conclusions associated with marginalisation, it also argues that much of this material and analysis has been modelled around worst-case scenarios for women. For example, women in the most disadvantaged positions of the labour market (with low status, low pay, and industrially marginalised) are not likely to have sufficient leverage to negotiate the strongest of enterprise agreements. However, research has not considered, in detail, the bargaining scenarios that might unfold for women in relatively stronger positions in the labour market. This more positive scenario might include professional or managerial women, the well-unionised and/or the industrially savvy. The next chapter will describe how this thesis intends to explore the bargaining experience for managerial women by outlining the methodology to be used.



**3.1 Introduction**

The key question guiding the analysis of this thesis is: Are the preferences of managerial women workers marginalised by enterprise bargaining? In order to answer this overarching question, this thesis will answer a number of subsidiary questions: Is it possible to identify the enterprise agreement preferences of managerial women and men?; Do women advance preferences for family-friendly provisions more strongly than men?; What drives the work preferences of men and women managers, and are these drivers distinctly gendered?; Do men or women managers engage in 'gendered' workplace behaviour and practice that serves to marginalise the interests of women in the context of enterprise bargaining?; Does the agreement ultimately reflect the preferences of either the men and women managers more strongly? This thesis argues that these questions can best be explored through examination of the enterprise agreement preferences voiced by managers themselves, and the narratives that underlie the formation of these preferences. This chapter describes and provides a rationale for the methodology underlying this approach.

This thesis seeks to explore a 'better case' bargaining scenario for women. The literature reviewed in chapter two highlights that research in this field has emphasised the obstacles and disadvantages women may face in an enterprise bargaining based system. However, as this thesis has noted, many of these assumptions derive from analyses based on 'worst case scenarios' for women workers. For example, women are likely to experience exclusion from bargaining because they are over-represented in low status and low pay occupations, in poorly unionised industries. Another example of the 'worst case scenario' approach is found in the assumption that women will be included in bargaining processes, but ultimately marginalised because of biases inherent to the industrial relations system. It is assumed that women's preferences are most likely shaped by a better work/family balance, and that these issues will be peripheral to many bargaining agendas.

This thesis proposes to use the profile of the highly disadvantaged women worker (outlined in the previous literature review) as a map or guideline. This guideline can be used to define the main *contrasting* characteristics appropriate for exploration of a 'better case' scenario for women workers. Further to this, the literature review highlights some methodological gaps associated with research in this field. This thesis will also seek to address these gaps, by including the following (less well explored) features:

- Detailed portrayal of worker preferences (a concurrent analysis of both men and women's preferences);
- Using worker preferences as the benchmark, an evaluation or audit of the formal document defining the terms and conditions of employment and working arrangements for these workers (in other words, the enterprise bargaining agreement);
- A unique perspective on bargaining outcomes by introduction of an occupational dimension to the analysis;
- Insight to the experience of bargaining for a key group of managerial or professional women workers and;
- An analysis of if, and how, marginalisation manifests for a group of workers in (comparatively) a better bargaining position.

### **3.2 Methodology rationale**

This thesis will deliberately focus its analysis on bargaining outcomes for a key group of women who do not conform to the profile of a disadvantaged or 'excluded' worker. Using this methodology, constructed around a 'better case' bargaining scenario for women, will allow exploration of other key assumptions regarding marginalisation and women's experience of bargaining.

#### **3.2.1 A better case scenario for women – key characteristics of an 'included' worker**

The foundation characteristic of a 'better case scenario' for women, is the selection of a higher status occupation. There are a number of reasons why an occupational analysis could enhance understanding of the impact of

bargaining for women. Firstly, occupational analyses allow greater understanding of the workplace constraints that may work to disadvantage women in bargaining. Examining the bargaining experience for women who are engaged at levels of higher pay, have some managerial status within the organisation and where a notion of professionalism and skill defines their role, allows an exploration of if, and how, marginalisation manifests for these women and whether common elements of disadvantage transcend occupational boundaries. Secondly, an exclusive analysis on women in professional and/or managerial positions in the labour market is a necessary addition to the field of bargaining research. As it stands, the impact of enterprise bargaining for these women are poorly understood, yet the growth in the 'professional' sectors of the labour market represents one of the strongest areas of growth over the last ten years (see table 1). In addition, this 'managerialisation' of the labour market is particularly significant for women workers.

The second characteristic of the better case scenario group is an industry and workplace location that is economically robust. The literature review argues that the most vulnerable workers in the labour market are women workers, located in industries 'peripheral' to the economy, in which productivity-based wage rises are hard to justify (either because of economic hardship or because measurement of productivity is difficult). Australian Bureau of Statistics (ABS) (2004) data shows that women workers are strongly represented in the education, health and community services sector and personal services sectors. This thesis argues that these sectors are not appropriate case studies because of the crisis in funding they have all faced in recent years. For example, nurses in Queensland, Victoria and NSW have all faced protracted industrial campaigns in the last few years over the issues of extended hours, staff shortages and unpaid overtime because of cost cutting to hospitals and aged care (Buchanan, Bretherton, Bearfield & Jackson 2004; Considine and Buchanan 2002). In the education sector in NSW, teachers in the public sector have faced significant staff cut backs and lengthy campaigns to achieve pay rises. Workers in the community services sector in NSW has also faced a



crisis in terms of poor working conditions for direct support and outreach workers.

An industry which offers some contrasting characteristics, and therefore a suitable case study location for the purposes of this thesis, is the banking sector. ABS (2004) labour force data shows that women occupy more than half of all positions in the finance and banking sectors. The banking industry in Australia has also performed strongly economically in the late 1990s. Although employers in the sector contend that the sector faces significant hardship due to deregulation and increased competition, all 'big four' banks (ANZ, Commonwealth Bank of Australia (CBA), National Australia and Westpac) have recorded record profits to stakeholders for a number of years (ANZ 2004; CBA 2004; NAB 2004; Westpac 2004). Not only is the industry female dominated, but in the last five to ten years, the numbers of women entering managerial positions in the banking sector has grown (HREOC 1997).

The third characteristic of the better case scenario group is a demonstrated history of industrial awareness and strength (for example high levels of union density) among employees. Researchers have documented a strong presence of unions in the banking industry, in contrast with many other white collar occupations (ACIRRT 2003). In particular, the CBA has historically shown extremely high rates of union membership among its workforce. Union membership, at its peak, has been documented as high as 96 per cent (Ashe 1997). While current rates of union membership are more difficult to ascertain, officials of the Commonwealth Bank Officers Section of the FSU estimate that anywhere in the order of half to more than 70 per cent of all CBA workers remain in the union, however there is no independent statistical source that can be used to verify this.

The banking sector in Australia also has a long established history of bargaining. Some researchers have noted that the banking sector has operated with an informal bargaining framework even before the formal introduction of a principle of enterprise bargaining (Ashe 1997). Growing competitive

pressure within the industry and intense workplace restructuring mean that the bargaining environment has been presented with some interesting challenges in terms of productivity, down sizing, and restructuring of labour processes. This should provide a rich data source for the exploration of how workplace issues and contentious bargaining problems have been resolved.

### 3.2.2 Questions of generalisability?

It could be argued that this approach, using what could be described as an 'atypical' workplace experience is not useful because the generalisability of the findings will be limited. This argument can be challenged on two counts. Firstly, as industrial relations researchers have noted, it is valid to analyse what can be considered an 'extreme' or exceptional case to illuminate knowledge in a particular field.

*"Single cases looking at a union, an organisation, or an event...may be used to represent a 'critical' case to test a theory, as an extreme or unique case to bring new insights, or as a 'revelatory' case which makes inaccessible information on a problem or question accessible"* (Gardner 1999: 56).

In other words, this thesis is not specifically concerned with how widespread this experience is. Rather, this thesis seeks to expose more detail about gendered processes at the level of individual agency. In other words, why does the experience of men and women workers manifest in the way it does, how does this generate particular outcomes in enterprise bargaining and are workplace and occupational settings influential in understanding these processes. As Watson notes, the study of social process gives insight to the structural relations as they exist. *"Whether my subjects are typical or not is not an issue. Rather, their lives represent 'instances' of social processes and therefore illustrate the way such processes might emerge from particular structural relations"* (Watson 1993: 418). With research goals focused on understanding process and interaction, the generalisability of findings to the experience of all women in all workplace contexts is not a guiding issue of the research.

### **3.3 Testing marginalisation assumptions**

The literature review has already highlighted that conclusions in this field of research to date, have been founded on a number of assumptions regarding the experience of marginalisation. The methodology of this thesis is constructed to test specific assumptions with regard to marginalisation. Firstly, researchers have tended to assume that women's preferences in enterprise agreements will be formed primarily by, or emerge from, a need to achieve a better balance between work and family. Yet, as a review of the literature reveals, this assumption has not been sufficiently tested because of the dearth of data available on worker preferences (let alone a gender disaggregated analysis of preferences, nor a means to solidly interpret the motivation for the preference given). This analysis will seek to directly address questions associated with marginalisation, by including two components that have been left unexplored by previous studies. A concurrent analysis of preferences (of both men and women) will be considered to see where the areas of similarity and difference exist, and to consider motivations for particular preferences. This will be followed by an analysis of enterprise agreement content to see if women's or men's preferences are given greater voice by the final enterprise agreement content.

### **3.4 The approach: a need for a case study analysis**

The lack of gender disaggregated data on enterprise agreements has always presented a significant, but not insurmountable constraint, on research in this field. As table 5 demonstrates, there is no single data source that can show the proportion of workers (either by gender or occupational group) covered by the range of industrial instruments (both bargaining and non-bargaining based) available under the current system. While a range of large scale national surveys have been commissioned (for example the Department of Workplace Relations (DEWR) has in the past, released coverage estimates based on random sample surveys) these rarely include (detailed) gender disaggregations. To overcome this problem, researchers have tended to use industry as a proxy for gender (male dominated versus female dominated



industries), comparing outcomes on a limited range of basic entitlements (for example annual wage increases and leave loadings).

**Table 5 Industrial arrangements: review of data sources available**

Arrangement	Key features	Monitored?	Time period monitored	Source	Gender disaggregation available	Occupational data available?	Industry data available?
Awards	Traditional arrangement determining pay and conditions. Determined by industrial relations tribunals – and apply to more than one employer	Public documents, therefore all available	Not monitored in a consolidated way	State & federal tribunals (eg AIRC)	No	No	Yes – but not in consolidated form
Award & agreement	Awards set base rates of pay with additional conditions (eg over-award) determined by an add-on agreement. Ie. agreeet works in conjunction with award	May have a combination of registered & unregistered agreements	Not monitored	Awards publicly available, agreements may or may not be	No	No	Patchy – some unions track, others do not. No consolidated source of information
Collective registered agreement	Collective agreement between management and employees (can occur with or without union involvement). Registered with a tribunal, but applies to a single employer or workplace workplace or employer (unlike awards). Agreeet supplants award	Yes. Surveys conducted – & databases available with content coded.	Some tracking available post 1995? Patchy – time series data generally not available, because categories change with each collection	ADAM service (maintained by acirrt) DEWRSB surveys – Agreeet coverage survey 1999 & Workplace Agreements Database	Not generally. Some very limited gender disaggregations available in some jurisdictions	Yes – limited variables	Yes – limited variables
Arrangement	Key features	Monitored?	Time period monitored	Source	Gender disaggregation available	Occupational data available?	Industry data available?
Registered individual agreements	Jurisdictional variations eg federal AWAs; Qld QWAs; WA individual contracts. Common feature – must be approved and registered with authorising agency	Very minimal. Private documents – some limited studies authorised by OEA.	N/A	Specific studies available – no database accessible	No	No	Limited
Unregistered agreements	Private agreement (verbal or written) between employer and individual employee	Not possible.	N/A	N/A	N/A	N/A	N/A

Source: Consolidated from analysis of a range of DEWRSB methodological appendices

This thesis argues that the research techniques used in this field (national statistical comparisons) must begin to respond to these constraints more effectively. Random sample surveys have been used to estimate coverage through the Department of Industrial Relations (DIR) Australian Workplace Industrial Relations Survey (AWIRS) and the Agreement and Award Coverage Survey (administered by Department of Workplace Relations (DEWR)). AWIRS was conducted in both 1990 and 1995 in an attempt to provide time series data on the impact of changes to working arrangements for both employers and employees. However, DEWR has discontinued funding to one of these survey projects (AWIRS) and has reduced the level of detail associated with the other survey (agreement and award coverage). The Agreement and Award Coverage Survey has released data estimating the coverage of workers by different industrial arrangements. However, again, this does not provide gender disaggregated data. A further constraint on this research is that an entire form of agreement making (individual-based agreements or Australian Workplace Agreements) is not freely available for scrutiny by researchers.

In effect, the changed industrial environment means that research methodologies must also change in order to explore new terrain. The growing emphasis on moving the emphasis of bargaining 'downwards' (MacDonald, Campbell and Burgess 2001) also means that the validity of 'bigger picture' analysis may be becoming less reliable. Some researchers contend that outcomes across the labour market are becoming less 'uniform', as greater fragmentation in the forms of bargaining occurs. Patterns of agreement provisions across industries, and within industries, can vary widely. In a comparative study of wages for men and women Arsovska, Heiler & Hall argue:

*"just as the processes and structures for bargaining have become more complex and fragmented, so too, has the related wages data. As wage determination becomes devolved to the workplace level, our ability to rely on aggregate wages data such as that generated by the ABS has also diminished"* (1999: 5).



Similarly, recent research findings from Whitehouse (2001) also emphasise the need to look beyond the aggregate picture. As Whitehouse notes “...aggregate statistics may be increasingly poor indicators of pay equity trends” (2001: 67). Aggregate statistics also need to consider other issues beyond earnings comparisons to assess whether bargaining has led to disintegration of labour market equality for women. While the need to monitor progress toward pay equity should rightly remain an important priority for governments and researchers, there is also evidence that other issues such as working hours, and occupational health and safety concerns have now become key areas in which erosion of working conditions has occurred (ACIRRT 1999).

There is evidence that the indicators used to assess and understand the quality of life, as experienced by women and men, may need revision. Recent pilot research by Austen, Jefferson and Thein (2003) explores definitional questions associated with quality of life and how to measure it. Austen et al’s (2003) research found that, among professional and managerial women, a wide degree of factors impact on women’s satisfaction levels at work. Traditional measures used to assess progress towards equity (for example earnings and remuneration) were found to be inadequate, as women noted a wide range of social, economic and spiritual issues to impact on what they assessed to be ‘progress’ towards goals at work. In other words, “*women’s perceptions of the relevance and meaning of existing indicators may also vary according to their experiences*” (Austen, Jefferson and Thein 2003: 2).

#### **3.4.1 Advantages of workplace and organisational analyses**

Historically, workplace and organisational level case studies have been an invaluable tool in the study of gender processes. Researchers in support of this approach argue that the ‘big picture’ leaves little scope for comparison of more complex and less visible issues, as these are confronted by men and women.

*“Thus gender systems and their evolution needs to be seen in their contexts if meaningful explanations and*

*understandings are to be developed. A holistic, or case study, approach is therefore required in order to study gender processes”* (Crompton & Birkelund 2000: 333)

Wajcman (1998) has also found workplace case studies to be highly effective in the analysis of men and women managers by arguing that these more focused studies gives greater voice to the perspectives of women, and men. In sociological studies, the workplace-based case study has also been a well tested method. As early as the 1970s, Moss Kanter's (1977) application of a workplace-case study methodology exposed the intimate (and concealed) workplace processes and how these are shaped by, and in turn shape, the interactions and behaviours of men and women. As Connell (2003) describes it, the need to understand how gender is 'practiced' in 'continuing workplace activity' through recurring actions, behaviour and attitudes of the workplace agents themselves.

Case studies have also long been considered a staple of industrial relations research. *“The most constant research method in industrial relations in Australia has been the case study”* (Kelly 1999: 119). The usefulness of case studies to the study of women and enterprise bargaining has also been demonstrated by other researchers. An increasing number of researchers recognise the need for more disaggregated data and for workplace-focused research to enhance understanding of decentralised bargaining arrangements (Whitehouse 2001; Probert 2000a; Crockett & Preston 1999, Houston 1996). In other words, surveys do not necessarily represent the only way in which detailed information can be collected in a meticulous manner. *“Researchers should never feel obligated to use the survey method if exploratory fieldwork suggests that the information could be better obtained using other methods”* (Callus 1999: 111). Case studies are increasingly recognised as a valid research technique in their own right, and not as an 'add-on' to other methods traditionally perceived to be more 'rigorous', such as large scale quantitative data collection.

### 3.4.2 Capture of women's and men's preferences essential

This thesis proposes an alternative way of viewing, assessing and evaluating the enterprise agreement is to see it through the eyes of the men and women workers. The approach described as 'grounded theory' has been influential in the development of the methodology for this thesis. This theory, developed in the 1960s notes the importance of generating a general hypothesis, gathering data, and then allowing the data to be the driver of theoretical development and formulation (Glaser and Strauss 1967). As Austen, Jefferson and Thein (2003) note, the use of grounded theory is especially useful when exploring research subjects and phenomena that do not conform to the 'usual'. For this reason, the grounded theory approach is particularly relevant to the 'better case' bargaining scenario being explored in the context of this thesis.

This thesis will place particular emphasis on the preferences of workers, and argues that clarifying and defining worker narratives is an essential part of this process. The value of worker perceptions has been commonplace in sociology (through the use of life history accounts for example) and gender studies. As Franzosi (1998) describes it, the value of the 'narrative' in sociology. This thesis argues that insights provided by this narrative mode of analysis can provide an effective way to evaluate the successes and/or failures of the enterprise agreement in place for these workers. Historically, understanding the views and perceptions of workers has provided a unique level of insight on the impact of enterprise agreements, and other changes to working arrangements and practices.

*"...there is integrity in people's understandings of their own work...Our position was that people speak with an understanding that represents, on the whole, their structural location in an organization"* (Junor, Barlow & Patterson 1993: 17).

In fact, attitudinal data and worker perceptions have been the foundation of some of the most extensive investigations into the impact of industrial arrangements including the British Workplace Industrial Relations Survey and the AWIRS and more recently, the Household Income and Labour Dynamics Survey (HILDA).



This thesis contends that a concurrent analysis of women's and men's preferences is essential, and can add a new, and stronger dimension, to enterprise bargaining research. A number of researchers have noted that feminist research in industrial relations is conceptually, in its early days. Much industrial relations research does not mention women at all, and as Pocock notes:

*“mainstream industrial relations has largely acted as if gender relations did not saturate most subjects of research and hold implications for theory, the construction of knowledge and research method”* (Pocock 1997: 2).

Feminist researchers would argue that gender, even if not made an explicit focus of research, is always influential. As industrial relations researchers Briskin & MacDermott observe, while women workers are often not studied, *“gender is always significant”* (1993: 10). If these processes remain unrecorded, they remain poorly understood.

It is important to note that explicit and singular focus on women in research methodologies is not necessarily the way forward. The examination of women's experiences without also considering the experience of men, is deemed by some researchers to represent a seriously flawed approach to gender study. As Pocock argues, the experiences of women are often not integrated with their experiences as workers. *“Workers have been men, without qualification or explanation, while women are **always and only** women”* (1997: 6). The interactions and perspectives of men and women workers as actors in the industrial context are still not well understood, as a number of feminist researchers in industrial relations have noted. Franzway (1997) describes the bias in research by saying that the underlying assumption is ‘men are the norm’, but this is rarely acknowledged as such by researchers. As Pocock (1997) notes, and others (Summers 2003) the norms which guide men, may or may not be the norms which guide women. Therefore, if a researcher claims to investigate concerns for women in their workplace, they have a responsibility to expose how these norms apply, under what

circumstances they apply, and the gendered effects arising from this impact. As O'Hara (1999) notes, feminist research methodologies must seek to give voice to, and reflect, the diversity of women's experience. The methodology used by this thesis seeks to capture, report and understand a greater level of diversity among women's preferences in their enterprise agreements.

When industrial relations researchers have approached the issue of gender and power, emphasis is often placed on the role that institutional agents play in perpetuating, or rectifying the power imbalance experienced by women. For example, the union movement has been vilified as the cause of much discriminatory practice in the workplace (Walby 1986) but also proclaimed as a potential champion of women's interests and critical to rectifying power imbalances (Collinson & Hearn 1994; Franzway 1997). However, the motivations of, and perceptions of women workers themselves, have not been a subject of intense study within this framework. Pocock, who has contributed to the field as both a union specialist and feminist, notes that greater attention needs to be given to the conditions favourable to this participation, and the workplace level factors that shape women's participation. Pocock argues that workplace researchers need to give more attention to the "*important clues to institutional life*" (Pocock 1997: 5). This thesis argues that this 'institutional life' does indeed warrant further analysis, and seeks to contribute directly to this field of research.

The need to capture and develop understanding of worker behaviour at an individual level, rather than at an institutional level, is noted by a number of researchers. The recognition that cumulative behaviours can generate 'gendered' process and habit within an organisation in a way that marginalises women is often accepted, but the production of this process remains unclear. The failure of research to analyse, or even address, the behaviour of men (individually and/or collectively) has been cited by a number of researchers. The term 'invisible man' has been used to describe the characterization of men's behaviour in workplace situations (Atkinson 2002). In compiling understanding of patriarchy in the workplace, understanding of the active role of men in this exclusion is opaque. As one researcher describes it, male

resistance to women, in a workplace setting, is not well understood (Williams 1992). As Pocock describes it "*the failure to analyse the fabric of men's behaviour and the resistance which men make to women*" (1997: 6). This has also been noted by researchers working in the field of organisational and gender studies. As McDowell states "*the position of men in the workplace and the assumptions about masculinity that suffused workplace practices were so invisible or taken for granted as not to warrant explanation*" (2001: 182). So too, in labour history, there has been acknowledgement that gendered practices can create favourable or unfavourable environments for women, at an institutional level. A number of accounts have traced the masculinity of the trade union movement to be a significant part of the historical failure of the movement to address women's concerns (Hallock 1997; Burgmann 1994; Walby 1986). While there is a general acceptance that behaviour can create a 'culture of resistance' to women, how this manifests in 'collusive' behaviour is less well explored by the literature. Wajcman (1998) documents some of these behaviours in describing the need for women to conform to male standards and practice in order to succeed in management. As William notes, it is essential to consider the collusion that can occur between men at work sites, in order to understand how this behaviour excludes women (Williams 1992). As William states "*Gender segregation is maintained by day to day interactions and struggles between men and women at the workplace*" (1992: 65).

The failure to address men's gender has, inadvertently, reinforced the view that women's concerns are atypical or abnormal. "*If men's gender or sexuality was taken as the norm in organizations, and so remained invisible, women's gender and sexuality was seen as atypical, out of place and troubling*" (Pocock 1997: 4). There is a growing call among feminist researchers to address this flaw, and so look more closely at behaviours at the workplace level and so provide greater insight on how men and women understand workplace issues (Wajcman and Martin 2004; Liff and Ward 2001; McDowell 2001). As Pocock shows, drawing women into the analysis is not enough. "*In institutions where masculinity is dominant (as in much of the industrial relations world) such an approach does not analyse important*



*aspects of organizational life which cannot be revealed through the study of women, but only by comparative study of men and women, or explicit study of men in particular” (1997: 4).*

This thesis argues that a case study of employees of a single banking organisation, which seeks to concurrently consider and analyse the preferences of both men and women in a similar higher status occupational position, is an appropriate way in which to consider the gaps that currently exist in research in this field.

### **3.5 Field work and components**

The fieldwork methodology of this thesis captures the preferences of women and men managers, but also seeks to examine the circumstances under which these preferences are formed and the rationale these workers provide for their agreement preferences.

#### **3.5.1 Data collection methods**

A total of 223 interviewees participated in the focus group data on which this thesis relies for its analysis. These 223 interviewees represent a mix of women and men managers, employed in the managerial stream at the Commonwealth Bank (CBA) in retail branches throughout NSW and the ACT. The common experience shared by these women and men managers is important to the discussion environment created by the focus groups. Austen, Jefferson and Thein (2003) have coined the term ‘affinity groups’ to describe focus group environments in which participants have a strong set of common experiences. This affinity, it is argued, creates an environment in which participants will feel most relaxed to talk openly and honestly, even on those subjects considered controversial. This thesis argues that these CBA focus groups represent an archetypal example of an ‘affinity’ group.

The interviewees attended these focus groups to discuss and air enterprise agreement preferences in the lead up to the formal enterprise agreement negotiation. Therefore, these focus groups represent a highly valuable source of data for worker preferences. The data recorded from these focus groups

represents an important form of consultation conducted by the union of their membership, in the formation of the enterprise agreement. The enterprise agreement drafted and put to the membership for a final vote, was formed as a direct result of the input provided by these focus group discussions.

The eighteen focus groups were commissioned by the Finance Sector Union, and conducted by an independent research agency (the Australian Centre for Industrial Relations Research and Training (ACIRRT), at the University of Sydney). ACIRRT has no connection to the union, other than as a contractor providing outsourced services. Both ACIRRT and the union gave their approval for me to attend all of these feedback sessions as a 'non-participant' observer. In this capacity, I was given permission to observe during the proceedings, and allowed to take notes and audio record the sessions. I also had access to full transcripts of all the focus groups for analysis. This includes more than 45 hours of audio recordings, and the typed transcripts. These interviews afforded me a unique opportunity to observe the perceptions of workers toward the enterprise agreement, gain insight to their experience as managers, but also observe interactions between these men and women managers.

### **3.5.2 The appropriateness of the data for the purposes of this thesis**

This thesis acknowledges that this data is now being applied to an additional purpose for which it was not originally intended. It must be acknowledged from the outset that the convening of these focus groups served two important roles for the union. The first was to give a comprehensive (qualitative) account of preferences for the membership of the union. In fact, this data represents the most detailed collection exercise conducted by the union in the process of agreement making. However, the convening of these focus groups is also an important exercise in outreach and public relations for the union, as it maintains a connection and sense of goodwill with its membership (or constituency). Although the data documented employee preferences (a main concern of this thesis), it was not originally intended to draw distinctions or comparisons between men and women workers, nor was it collected to seek insights on workplace culture and practices at the workplace level.

Although the methodology of ACIRRT's original research mission did not include a gendered analysis of preferences, this does not disqualify the importance of this focus group data as a significant ethnographic data source. This approach is consistent with the principles of sound academic research, particularly feminist research. As Morgan argues in an analysis of women in bureaucracy, it is appropriate to "*recover some of the concealed gender themes within these apparently gender less texts*" and to "*interrogate such texts in order to en-gender them*" (1995:43). In addition, the compilation of these worker commentaries amounts to a large qualitative database, and is amenable to interrogation. This also occurs with large quantitative data bases (such as AWIRS, the Survey of Training and Expenditure or the Census, which are interrogated for a wide range of reasons, and applied to a wide range of research purposes.

It is also important to note that this thesis is aiming to uncover subtle or concealed aspects of workplace culture, and how these include or exclude women and men workers. I believe this material presents a unique opportunity to explore these issues *precisely* because it was collected without a direct line of questioning regarding the issues for 'men' and 'women'. As McDowell notes in her analysis of interview material taken from finance sector workers in the UK "*interview material cannot be infinitely rethought – the initial aims of the investigation restrict that – but it is possible to return to material and look at it again from a slightly different perspective*" (2001: 195).

This data provides the opportunity to explore the key questions of this thesis. Firstly, it documents both men's and women's preferences in enterprise agreements, it allows the preference content to be compared, and to identify the drivers of these preferences. This data also allows the behaviour of men and women toward each other to be considered by the research, and whether this behaviour mediates and shapes enterprise agreement preferences.



### **3.5.3 Conformity to sound research protocols**

The way in which this data was collected makes it particularly appropriate for the aims of this thesis. The convenor of the focus group was given direct instruction from the union to maintain a minimal role in directing discussion. In large part, the focus group discussion was free forming and self-directed. This gives scope for particularly interesting insights to the way in which men and women interact, and the ways in which men and women attempt to shape the discussion.

The data collection process conformed to sound interview and focus group protocols. The union indicated a genuine intention to be removed or absent from the proceedings in order for the environment to be open for employees to communicate and offer suggestions. To ensure this 'impartiality' in the data collection, in 1999 the FSU commissioned an independent research agency (ACIRRT) to conduct focus groups with union members employed across the Commonwealth Bank. In other words, while the union funded the data collection, the union remained at arms length during the actual operation of the project. FSU officials did not attend the focus groups to observe or participate. In the range of twelve to fifteen participants attended each focus group, consistent with a cap set by ACIRRT to limit the size of each focus group. This cap allowed all participants the opportunity to speak, within the (approximately) two hour focus group.

Complete privacy of the participants has been maintained. This thesis has assigned pseudonyms to all participants. At no point is it necessary to disclose the identity of the manager. Where relevant to the analysis, additional personal characteristics (such as age, specific occupational position and length of time with the bank) have been included as descriptors.

### **3.5.4 Appropriate timing**

These sessions provide an excellent account of worker preferences because they were collected precisely before the negotiation of an upcoming agreement, and are pertinent to a specific stream of agreement making. The FSU identified four main intentions to the convening of 'agreement feedback

sessions. The sessions were intended to give employees an opportunity to review and identify *any* issues of concern – this could include issues facing the banking industry, their occupation, and more specifically, issues facing their workplace. The sessions were convened to help identify any problems with the existing agreement, as perceived by the employee. The sessions were intended to identify the key issues that should be addressed in the upcoming agreement. Employees were given a blanket opportunity to comment on union strategy, possible wording of clauses, and the scope of issues to be included in the upcoming agreement. Finally, from this feedback, the union indicated an intention to distil the key issues. These key issues would form the basis of the next round of bargaining negotiations. While these feedback sessions were a starting point in the long process of negotiation of the agreement, they nevertheless give a remarkably raw account of worker motivations for enterprise agreement preferences.

### **3.6 Profile of focus group participants**

The focus groups comprised a cross section of five different business units across the Commonwealth Bank's retail bank operations. The participants were evenly spread between classified and general classified staff. Just under half of the participants had been with the bank for more than ten years, just under one-quarter for between six and ten years, and just over one-quarter for less than five years (see table 6). A high proportion, more than 70 per cent of the participants were in middle management positions or above. In the hierarchical structure of the bank, this includes supervisors classified at general classification level three or above. The managers and middle managers who participated in these focus groups were all in positions of significant responsibility and status within their workplaces (team leaders, branch managers, assistant managers). In some cases, the participating managers were responsible for teams of twenty or more staff.

A number of researchers have perceived a decline in the status and form of the branch manager role in retail banking, over the last two decades (ACIRRT 1994; Reinecke 1988). While these changes to manager roles in banking are acknowledged, this paper still contends that these workers represent an

appropriate group of professionals suitable for this analysis. Managers and assistant managers still represent the highest classification level within a retail branch work unit. In terms of the wider labour market, these women and men are highly experienced and skilled white collar workers who consider themselves to be professional and career-focused.

**Table 6**                      **Profile of focus group participants**

<b>Characteristic</b>	<b>Raw</b>	<b>%</b>
<b>Classification level</b>		
Middle manager or higher	158	71
General classification level (GC 2 or below)	65	29
<b>Total</b>	<b>223</b>	
<b>Length of service</b>		
<5 years with bank	66	30
6-9 years with bank	52	23
10 or more years with bank	105	47
<b>Total</b>	<b>223</b>	
Total number and proportion of women participants	136	61

The participants of the focus groups included a wide range of managerial positions within the retail bank division of the Commonwealth bank. All of these workers were covered under the stream of collective certified agreements negotiated with the Finance Sector Union. In short, the occupational groups that are part of the retail bank structure but not included in this thesis are all entry level and positions without significant supervisory responsibilities within grades (eg tellers, customer service officers grade 1-3, and back office processing staff). The occupational groups included in this analysis are: personal lenders; relationship managers; personal bankers; personal business bankers; credit managers; sales managers; credit analysts; assistant retail branch managers; branch managers.



The men and women managers involved in this study were all long standing members of the FSU at the time of interview. The FSU has historically had a strong presence in the banking sector in Australia, and in the case of the CBA, the union has represented the majority of CBA workers since the establishment of the bank (Ashe 1997; Hill 1982). In recent years, there has been some splintering in union representation across the banking industry, with some workers electing to undertake Australian Workplace Agreements. However, the FSU remains the majority stakeholder in bargaining for the bank both at the time of the interviews (1999), and at the present time.

This thesis contends that managers in retail banks present a unique opportunity to consider key aspects of workplace change and possible empowerment for women. The literature review has emphasized that a substantial gap in this field of research has been the failure to address the impact of workplace culture in studies of bargaining impact. This thesis argues that managers make a particularly useful inclusion to research because managers often bring unique insights to organizational life, and the workplace culture of a business. As Wacjman states "*The managerial job is the repository of power and authority, the site of decision and rule making within organizations*" (1999: 216). Researchers have acknowledged that the role of managers in an organization (including senior and middle managers) is pivotal in the creation and maintenance of particular organizational structures, and the creation of particular 'cultures' in the workplace. Jacoby (1999) notes that managers represent both the victim and protagonist of elements of restructuring because they represent an important and pivotal occupational group in the structure of organizations. In effect, they represent a 'litmus' group, through which the impacts of change might be assessed.

### 3.7 **Process of data collection: some additional details**

The duration of a focus group discussion was approximately two hours. The focus groups commenced after standard working hours (commencing at 7pm). Participation in focus groups was completely voluntary, and specific provisions were made to ensure that workers with family commitments were able to attend. The focus groups were convened after working hours to ensure that no workers felt pressured by the employer not to attend. To ensure that workers with children were not disadvantaged because of the late commencement time, workers were eligible to receive \$20 in order to cover costs associated with child care.

Focus group participants were randomly chosen from union membership lists, provided by the union to the research agency. Members were then approached by phone. Members also received advance warning from the union through union bulletins (email and print copies). Of the 300 members who indicated they would attend the focus group sessions, a total of 223 members participated in the study. This amounts to an effective response rate of 75 per cent.

While the characteristics of this data set mean it presents a unique opportunity to explore both men's and women's views and perceptions, some limitations also need to be acknowledged. It cannot be assumed that the participants of these focus groups comprise a representative sample of *all* men and women workers currently at this bank. Non-unionised bank workers did not attend the focus groups (as participation was only canvassed from current membership lists). It also needs to be acknowledged that individuals most willing to attend these types forums may be those most aggrieved with the current agreement, and the wider restructuring agenda of the bank. The majority of the participants were female (61 per cent). The focus groups were conducted from July to September 1999. This is just prior to the commencement of formal negotiations between FSU senior officials and human resource management at the bank over the next enterprise agreement.

The sessions were conducted 'off site' (that is, a neutral location such as an RSL). The groups were conducted primarily in the Sydney metropolitan area and regional centres such as Newcastle, Wollongong and Canberra.

Participants were provided with dinner, tea and coffee. To ensure that the workers could arrive safely home, travel costs for attendance were paid by the FSU (that is, each participant was provided with a cab-charge).

It is important to note from the outset that the focus group convenor did not 'lead' nor 'prompt' any of the discussions by introducing key issues that might, or should be, concerns of the workforce. The convenor had three main roles. Firstly, the convenor attended to administrative concerns by ensuring that all names and biographical details of participants were recorded.

Secondly, the convenor ensured that basic meeting protocols were observed throughout the focus groups by ensuring that all speakers had an opportunity to contribute to the discussion. These protocols were observed by two techniques. The first technique included observance of a 'verbal queue'. For example, if several participants began speaking simultaneously the convenor would 'queue' speakers to ensure they all had an opportunity to contribute to the discussion. Another example includes the direct solicitation of quieter members of the discussion group to ensure that these participants were also given the opportunity to speak, if desired. Thirdly, the convenor provided a 'summation' at the conclusion of the focus group. This summation distilled the main issues raised, and asked the group to give support (vote) for which concerns should be recorded as the enterprise agreement preferences advanced by that group.

The focus groups were semi-structured. The facilitators were given a list of topic areas that would be discussed (broadly) but did not deliberately lead the participants in any direction of discussion beyond that (see below). For example, the topic might be: possible issues for an upcoming enterprise bargaining agreement, but the facilitator did not suggest what the key issues might or should be. A convenor and note-taker attended every session. All sessions were recorded, however a note-taker also took notes throughout the sessions. I was able to take my own notes for cross referencing during the



course of the focus group proceedings. This allowed me to cross-check my notes, typed transcripts and audio recordings for accuracy.

Although the focus groups were not rigidly structured, the convenor was given the following areas to 'cover' throughout the course of the session. Managers were asked to explore the negative and positive issues associated with their job and working environment, their attitudes and concerns with the FSU, and the key issues that they would like the FSU to pursue in enterprise agreement negotiations.

### **3.8 Additional data sources for this thesis**

The qualitative data explored in this thesis will be supplemented with statistical data, wherever this available. Primary source material such as published and unpublished union and employer circulars and memoranda, bank annual reports, public seminars and speeches regarding performance and prospectus documents are applied in the analysis of this thesis. All collective certified agreements for the Commonwealth Bank from the period of the first formal enterprise agreement (1993) to the current agreement, were held within the Australian Industrial Relations Commission (AIRC) database. The full text of these agreements were accessed electronically from the AIRC<sup>1</sup>. Secondary sources such as economic data and any internal CBA labour market data have been analysed to understand the competitive pressures and employment structure of the banking industry. An analysis of qualitative commentary provided by workers of both their enterprise agreement, but also their workplace circumstances and the motivations informing their particular preferences.

### **3.9 Conclusion**

This chapter has reviewed the data collection methods associated with the qualitative data, on which this thesis relies. The methodology of the thesis seeks to address some less well explored areas of enterprise agreement analysis, namely a concurrent analysis of men's and women's preferences in

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<sup>1</sup> It should be noted that new storage and retrieval protocols apply to federal certified agreements, and they are no longer available from the OSIRIS search engine through the AIRC website.

the enterprise agreement making process and a preference-driven analysis of agreement outcomes. The following chapter will introduce the Commonwealth Bank as the case study with which this thesis is concerned. Chapter four will note the major impacts of restructuring within the bank, and the impact these changes have had on managerial roles particularly. This context setting is necessary because of the profound level of change faced by these workers in the period preceding negotiation of their enterprise agreement.

### **4.1 Introduction**

This chapter introduces and examines the Commonwealth Bank (CBA) as the workplace case study at the heart of this thesis. This context setting is considered an important element of industrial relations research protocol, particularly in the field of enterprise bargaining case studies. As researchers such as Lansbury, Baird and Wright (2005) show, exploration of bargaining must be premised on a knowledge of restructuring and institutional change, as it has occurred within the sector being considered by the analysis.

Before this thesis can identify the enterprise agreement preferences of men and women managers, the general areas of concern for the workforce must be explored and understood in context. This chapter therefore provides a backdrop for this discussion by sketching out the industrial environment that these managers faced preceding the formation of the 2000 enterprise agreement, and the major issues facing retail branch managers at the time of the focus-group based interviews. At the time of the interviews, the bank was undergoing a significant restructuring process. This reorganization of the bank's structure specifically targeted management roles at retail branch sites. This analysis is conducted through use of the data collected via the focus group interviews with managers, but also through interrogation of unpublished labour market data relevant to the banking sector, and internal labour market data from the bank (where this could be acquired).

Radical restructuring within the CBA has affected the scale of retail bank activities and the nature of the tasks associated with customer service roles, and particularly management roles within the retail bank division. For staff operating within these environments, the pace of work has become more intense. Senior



executive of the bank argue that this restructuring has been necessary because of the increased level of competition within the sector. However, there is also evidence that senior bank executives have used arguments associated with a more competitive environment to justify a greater degree of managerial prerogative and dominion over the workforce. The following section outlines the major risks to the managers at the heart of this study in terms of increased competition, downsizing, restructuring and re-engineering of managerial roles in the bank. The boundaries of what it means to be a manager have changed within the CBA, and there is a strong consensus among managers that this has created a 'career crisis' for the managers affected.

#### **4.2 Increased competition, but also increased opportunism**

Since the mid 1980s Australian retail banking institutions have faced a more competitive environment in the delivery of retail bank services (Edey & Grey 1996, Productivity Commission 1995; Alexander & Frank 1990). Prior to deregulation, the larger (more traditional) banking institutions faced a fairly sheltered commercial environment, only facing competition between each other, and within domestic borders. It is not necessary to provide a detailed review of deregulation reform in Australia, however, there appears to be a general consensus that this competition has posed particular challenges for the larger Australian banking institutions (sometimes termed the 'big four') (Fung, Bain, Onto and Harper 2002; Kitay, Regini and Baegthe 1995). The 'big four' includes the National Australia Bank, ANZ, Westpac and the CBA. Within their own official reporting processes, these banks have all individually argued that the challenges they have faced in the new financial environment have been exceptional (ANZ 2004; CBA 2004; NAB 2004; Westpac 2004).

It could be argued that the CBA has faced a more intense restructuring experience, due to the simultaneous effects of the 'double whammy' - financial deregulation and the impact of corporatisation and privatization. The *Commonwealth Bank Restructuring Act* was passed in 1990, which formally

changed the official status of the organization from a government business enterprise (GBE) to a publicly listed company with share capital. In 1991, the restructuring process began with a force, with an initial share issue of more than 230 million shares in order to strengthen CBA's capital base. In June 1996, the Federal Government sold its remaining shareholding in the CBA, which amounted to just over 50 per cent. The restructuring processes, particularly associated with increasing efficiency and productivity of the workforce, undertaken by the bank since 1991 have been driven by both the internal privatization process, but also wider competitive pressures felt across the sector.

The relaxation of rules relating to entrants to the retail banking market had two significant implications for the larger banking institutions. Internationally based businesses began trading and competing in Australia for retail bank consumers. In addition, deregulation allowed Australia-based non-banking institutions to compete with banking institutions in the delivery of a wider range of retail bank products. From 1984 onwards, foreign banks have been allowed to compete with Australian banks in the delivery of retail bank services (Edey & Grey 1996: 27). Researchers writing at the time, noted the aggressiveness with which foreign operators entered the Australian market, with almost twenty licenses to operate within Australian borders granted within weeks of the official implementation of deregulation (Alexander & Frank 1990: 9).

Researchers also emphasise the difficulties that the big four banks have faced in an environment of increased competition from domestic operators. Within this research, it is implied that larger operators have been less able to adapt and restructure in order to compete. Since 1984, some non-bank institutions have been eligible to convert to bank status. Kitay, Regini and Baethge (1995) note this aspect of deregulation to be particularly important because building societies and credit unions have been taking advantage of this opportunity for almost

twenty years, with a solid stream of non-banks converting to 'bank' status from 1980 right through until the late 1990s.

This thesis argues that while the commercial environment in retail banking in Australia has indeed altered, there is evidence that the big four banks have responded aggressively to challenges associated with competition. Building societies and smaller banking operators have not been the only beneficiaries of financial deregulation. The Australian Prudential Regulation Authority (APRA) reports on the number of financial operators in Australia, and also provides some insight to the sheer size and capital reserve on which these businesses operate. Table 7 illustrates how these categories are broken down by the main characteristics of commercial activities undertaken. Financial intermediaries are those operators responsible for the provision of deposit and loan transactions, with these services provided on a capital guaranteed basis. As table 7 shows, in the provision of retail bank services the CBA is one of 45 active 'banking group' competitors, but also operates in competition with 273 other competitors in retail banking. Looking more closely at the table however, the influence and power of these banking groups is apparent. The asset or reserve base on which these banks continue to operate, dwarfs any of the smaller competitors by a hefty margin.



**Table 7      Australian financial institutions – characteristics and numbers of operators (major providers of retail banking products) 2000**

<b>Institution</b>	<b>Characteristics</b>	<b>No. of active groups</b>	<b>Total assets (\$b)</b>
<b>Financial intermediaries</b>			
Banks	Wide range of traditional deposit taking activities, expanding into funds management	45	760
<b>Non-bank financial intermediaries</b>			
Building societies	Traditional range of banking services including deposits, loans, credit.	18	13
Credit unions	Traditional services – deposits, loans, payments services	211	23
Minor Merchant banks	Wholesale borrowing & lending services (eg to corporations, government)	40	77
Finance companies	Provide ‘finance’ or loan services (largely small or medium businesses)	61	74
Securitisers	Provide special purpose products eg mortgage-based housing loans	52	72
<b>Total</b>		<b>382</b>	<b>1019</b>

In addition, all of the ‘big four’ have reported record profits for more than a decade. Bank employers argue that restructuring has been necessary to assure the survival of their businesses. However, the level of profit achieved suggests the businesses are far from breaking even, and appear to be thriving (ANZ 2004; CBA 2004; NAB 2004; Westpac 2004). In the case of the CBA, profits have grown from \$500 million in 1991 to more than \$3.5 billion in 2005.

The profits that continue to be recorded in this sector, despite the increase in competition within the banking market is explained (in part) by the way in which banks have elected to respond to this challenge. All of the four large banks in Australia have retreated from and withdrawn their emphasis on retail banking as the cornerstone of their business operations. The big four have used the opportunities provided by the deregulated banking environment to penetrate other sectors of the financial services industry, and consolidate their presence within these markets (examples including broking, insurance and superannuation). Plans for overseas expansion have also featured prominently in plans to consolidate financial strength across the big four. Examples include the activities of the ANZ and the NAB in their funds management activities in South East Asia, the expansion of Westpac life insurance and other product marketing to a number of European nations, and CBA's plans to deliver funds management services in the Asia Pacific region and New Zealand.

#### **4.3 Employment decline across the retail banking sector**

Banks have also responded to the challenge of deregulation by shearing back branch-based customer service roles within the firm. Employment in what might be traditionally called 'banking roles' has been in strong decline in the banking sector for some time. The most reliable statistics available on employment levels in banking sector are published by the Australian Bureau of Statistics (ABS), and are located within the industry classification 'finance and insurance industry'. While the ABS routinely reports aggregate labour market figures for this industry group, unpublished data (providing a greater level of disaggregation) must be used to understand the picture for banking workers nestled within this generic category.

Disaggregated data from 1996 to 2002 has been selected because it covers the period of observation pertinent to the enterprise agreement and the bank managers being examined during the course of this thesis. Comparing the finance sector against the other sectors within the finance and insurance industry gives insight to



how the sector has declined compared to others within the wider industry. The 'finance sector' represents workers engaged in work that most closely matches (what might be termed) classic retail branch work. This category includes bank and credit union workers, as well as those employed in other deposit-taking financial institutions offering a comparable suite of retail branch-based customer transactions. The 'insurance industry' includes the life insurance and superannuation sectors, as well as general health and insurance companies. The 'services to finance sector' includes those engaged in money exchange services, broking (including stock and insurance) and futures exchange. Table 8 shows that, while the industry as a whole has grown, none of this growth has occurred in the finance sector. The starting point of 1991 has been used, because in restructuring terms, this was a significant year for the Commonwealth Bank as a number of formal restructuring processes began (including privatization).

**Table 8**                      **Sectoral employment levels, Finance and Insurance industry 1996-2002**

Year	Finance	%change	Insurance	%change	Services	%change	Total
1991	224 400		77 200		51 300		352 800
1996	190 800	-15	61 000	-21	69 900	+36	321 600
1998	194 100	+1.7	50 400	+17	78 600	+12	323 100
2000	184 801	-4.7	64 893	+28.7	86 991	+10.6	336 685
2002	156 867	-15	74 586	+14.9	113 494	+30.4	344 946

Source: ABS Labour force Catalogue 6203 (unpublished disaggregations). Data provided by Finance Sector Union (FSU).

While the finance sector showed some very small evidence of growth between 1996 to 1998, the sector has been in sharp and steady decline since that time. The insurance and services to finance sectors, in contrast, show extremely strong growth. Over the same period, the insurance sector increased by one fifth, and the services to the finance sector increased by almost two-thirds from 1996 to 2002. It is important to note that, due to the restructuring that has occurred within the large banks, this national data is echoed within these large banks. ANZ, Westpac, CBA and NAB are all now major providers of insurance and brokering services. Within these internal labour markets, the same shift is observable from retail



banking activities (which are in decline) to growth in the newer insurance, brokering and investment arms of these operations (which have experienced employment growth).

#### **4.4 The 'traditional' retail branch in decline at the Commonwealth Bank**

Restructuring, and changes to service delivery occurring within the Commonwealth Bank during the 1990s, represents a microcosm of the changes observable across the banking sector in Australia. Retail branch staff have become less important to the main operations of banking, and the number of workers in these roles have been reduced by the Commonwealth bank across both regional and urban areas. The retail branch representing the symbolic 'face' of the bank has also lost some stature, as branch closures have occurred Australia wide (in both urban and regional centres).

In the 1990s, the retail branch is no longer the core aspect of business operations that it once was within the Commonwealth Bank. Looking at the annual reports to shareholders for the Commonwealth Bank, in every year from 1994 through to 2002, the bank declares a commitment to international expansion of overseas investments and operations. The provision of retail bank services now represents only one segment of the Commonwealth Bank's operations. The Commonwealth Bank operates in New Zealand (through ASB Group), offers life insurance services in Asia, operates in fund management in Singapore, UK, Hong Kong and China and has offices throughout USA, UK, Asia and the Pacific. As the CBA in its own words asserts "*The long term goal is for 25 per cent of market capitalisation to be represented by offshore earnings streams*" (CBA 2003). This is vastly different to the 1980s in which the CBA had virtually no international profile, and confined its operations entirely within domestic borders.

4.4.1 Retail branch closures

Retail branches have been specifically targeted by the Commonwealth Bank in strategies to reform the organization. Statistical data available on branch closures in the Commonwealth Bank shows that the retail branch has been in decline since the early 1990s. Retail branch closures began gradually in 1993, however intense branch consolidation can be seen from 1995 onwards. Table 9 indicates the scale of branch closure from 1995 to 2002. Each bank closure means the loss of retail branch and assistant branch manager positions within the occupational hierarchy of the Commonwealth Bank.

This data shows that the desire to reform the retail banking sector has been bank wide and has not been confined to particular geographical areas. The downsizing of branches has been unfailing (closures have occurred in every year, with a peak occurring in 1998), and widespread (every state has been affected).

**Table 9                    CBA Branch closures 1995 to 2002, Australian states**

State	1995	1996	1997	1998	1999	2000	2001	2002	TOTAL
NSW	21	32	10	38	13	28	18	6	166
VIC	14	12	30	62	19	31	17	7	192
QLD	2	13	13	16	13	18	11	2	88
SA/NT	2	2	4	7	6	5	7	1	34
WA						12	3	3	18
TAS			2	2					4
TOTAL	39	39	59	125	51	94	56	19	502

Source: Compiled from multiple sources: FSU unpublished data and Commonwealth Bank *Annual Report* data 1995-2002.

Branch closures can be explained in part by changes to technology, that have provided the bank with opportunities to reduce labour costs. Labour costs typically consume the greater proportion of a corporate budget (Avkiran 1998). The introduction of internet banking and automatic teller machines has meant that these functions can be performed more cheaply using automated technologies (Atkinson 2002; Holmlund and Kock 1996; Kitay, Regini and Baegthe 1995;).

Branch closures can also be explained through a change in emphasis of the bank's operating model, which will be discussed next.

#### **4.5 A new operating model for retail branches**

The large Australian banks have responded in a very uniform way, in meeting the challenges posed by a deregulated financial environment. All four banks have implemented new models of service delivery, which have expanded the range of retail banking products from which consumers can choose, and altered the meaning and tasks associated with customer service delivery roles.

The approach to retail banking service delivery has fundamentally changed across the banking industry. At one time, large banks in Australia followed a model of what might be termed regional 'saturation' in order to remain commercially competitive. In other words, operators sought to gain competitive advantage through increasing the sheer number of retail branch locations, and hence increasing the number of customer access points. Reinecke (1988) argues the branch expansion program had been a central element of banking strategy for decades, and had as its primary objective the growth of assets. This period of branch expansion was strong for a twenty year period at least – from the post war period in the 1950s through to the 1970s.

Within this 'saturation' model, branch level leadership positions (managers and assistant managers) have traditionally been what might be termed the cultural 'helmsmen' of banking. This is a well documented element of banking culture that is not common across the industry, and not peculiar to the CBA. Both Hill's (1982) and Ashe's (1997) studies of the CBA note the iconic status of branch managers to the maintenance of CBA culture. This has also historically been the case in other banks, as confirmed by a range of other studies conducted on workplace culture in banking (Atkinson 2002; Prendergast and Marr 1994). There is evidence that the importance of the 'branch' and its valued place within the core activities of bank has changed significantly since the 1980s. As Reinecke



(1988) notes, the opening of new branches is no longer part of the strategy to expand the deposit base.

#### 4.5.1 Emergence of satellite banking

Each of the large banks has used a different term to describe this fundamental shift in service delivery from 'saturation' to 'satellite'. This approach is not peculiar to the Commonwealth bank, and has been adopted by all of the large bank operators. ANZ refer to it as 'networking' where branch networks have been consolidated into area banks, and then regional branches. The NAB refers to 'area operation centres' and Westpac use the term 'district operation centres'. This has been identified in many studies as the North American satellite banking model (Holmlund and Kock 1996; Reinecke 1988), and has affected restructuring processes widely throughout America, the UK and Europe (Sinden 1996). It is the creation of this satellite banking model that is argued to have contributed to the decline in career expectations leading directly from branch work.

*"The effect of satellite banking on the career expectations of bank staff was predictable, with 70 per cent of the staff employed in the branch network. Its diminution led to loss of jobs and career logjams as the number of management posts declined" (Reinecke 1988: 113).*

Reconfiguration of the organisational structure within the Commonwealth Bank has also altered the level of autonomy associated with retail bank branch management positions. To begin with, not all retail branches are replicated on the same model providing the same suite of services to the consumer. As the range of products delivered by the CBA has diversified, so branch models have been modified to accommodate the more specialized range of products available. While some branches remain devoted to the delivery of standard transactions (deposits, withdrawals, merchant tellering, and loan advice and processing), these branches have declined in number and are typically located in regional areas (CBA 2003).

In the CBA, central branches (termed 'area offices') are now responsible for administrative decision making powers and have complete jurisdiction over staffing, absolute discretion over leave arrangements and the policing of targets. Historically, decision making responsibilities were shared between the area office and retail branch manager. Under the new and restructured bank environment, the area office services a network of 'service branches' (retail branches). These service branches are responsible for customer contact, but have also been given a substantial responsibility to market the bank and the full suite of bank products now available.

#### **4.5.2 Traditional models of 'customer service' in decline**

Throughout the 1990s, the Commonwealth Bank Group expanded the range of financial services it provided to include retail, business and institutional services, investment banking, funds management, superannuation, general insurance, brokerage services and finance company activities. Branches now function more as sales outlets, and are valued for their ability to promote and cross promote other banking products (including life insurance). Again, the experience of banking product diversification is not peculiar to the Commonwealth Bank alone. Cook & Hababou emphasise that the 'sales' component of bank branch activity is now given greater emphasis than ever before in the history of banking (2001: 299). The notion of 'cross selling' in banking has become one of the most popularized terms associated with bank work in recent years. This notion was almost non-existent within Australian retail banking prior to the 1990s (Avkiran 1998).

Table 10 shows that the retail branch as the primary access point for customer contact has been in decline over the late 1990s to the early 2000s (the period of observation used for the purposes of this thesis). Kitay, Regini and Baegthe (1995) argue that undermining the role of the retail branch manager has in fact, formed the basis of bank strategy. This strategy has included increasing the number of specialised branches, placing limitations on the number of service

branches, consolidating decision making powers, expansion of electronic based banking points and the closure of bank branches (Atkinson 2002; Sinden 1996; Kitay et al 1995: 91). Looking at official Commonwealth Bank shareholder documentation, there is strong evidence that retail branches have suffered while all other forms of customer access routes have grown. Table 10 shows that in the five years leading to up to 2001, the number of classic retail branches declined by 20 per cent across the bank. Meanwhile, alternative customer access points that would supersede the use of retail branches for most customer transactions grew exponentially. Researchers such as Prendergast & Marr (1994) note the significance of these self-service technologies to undermining the status of managers, and the sense of 'displacement' felt by retail branch managers in this period. The number of ATMs provided by the bank Australia wide grew by almost 70 per cent. This meant that basic transactions (withdrawals up to a fixed daily limit, and deposits to any value) to any CBA savings and cheque accounts could be conducted through these terminals. The use of electronic funds transfer at the point of sale (EFTPOS) terminals almost doubled during this same period. This means retail outlets have become a main conduit for cash withdrawals from the bank in many cases, and bank customers need make no direct contact with the bank in order to access funds. In addition, the outsourcing of retail bank functions has occurred. 'Ezy banking' sites are effectively CBA branches outsourced to other agencies (including some pharmacies and the Woolworths grocery chain). In five years, almost 700 Ezy banks have opened Australia wide. These outsourced operations are not staffed, administered or managed by any bank staff. Employees of the outsourcee are independently trained to perform and administer some of the more complex customer transactions, while others are performed through use of an electronic outlet located within the store.

Retail branches have been specifically targeted in cost reduction strategies of banks. As Morgan, Cronin & Severn (1995) note, the reasons behind this strategy are clear. The highest costs within the banking sector are tied to the maintenance of the traditional retail branch network, with the uppermost principal costs within



this structure being staff and premises (Morgan, Cronin & Severn 1995). Annual report and prospectus documentation throughout the 1990s show the Commonwealth bank has specifically targeted cost reduction on both of these measures through downsizing staff in the retail bank divisions, and bank closures (1998).

**Table 10      CBA customer access points, Australia wide, 1997-2001**

Customer access points	2001	2000	1999	1998	1997
Branches or service centres	1066	1441	1162	1218	1334
Agencies	3928	4020	3934	4015	4205
ATMs	3910	4141	2602	2501	2301
EFTPOS terminals	122074	116064	90152	83038	63370
EZY banking sites	659	603	n/a	N/a	n/a

Source: CBA Annual report data 1997-2001

The restructuring of production processes within the bank, and the increased use of outsourcers has also meant that the retail bank has lost significance as the primary customer access point. Telephone banking (the creation of call centres, who are not staffed by permanent CBA staff) has meant that the retail branch is no longer the solitary source regarding new banking products or for customers to access account information.

**4.6      The impact of change on retail branch management**

Retail branch management roles within the bank have been both in decline, but also in a state of flux throughout the 1990s. The closure in branches is highly significant because it has altered the make up and structure of the managerial hierarchy within the bank. In aggregate terms, the new bank structure has meant a reduction in the availability and access of workers in the retail bank division to manager and assistant manager positions. Table 10 notes that over a five year period, a minimum of 600 managerial jobs (at least) in the retail bank division have been eradicated Australia wide. From 1997 and 2001, the CBA closed

approximately 300 retail branches, and each branch typically held a manager level position in addition to one or more assistant manager positions. Although it is not possible to definitively state how many managers have or have not been redeployed into comparable positions within the bank structure, anecdotal evidence from the Finance Sector Union suggests that many managers were either made redundant, or given positions so untenable as to encourage resignation (FSU 1997).

The significance of this restructuring extends beyond the numerical loss of manager level positions alone. The bank has effectively cut away a band of positions within the occupational hierarchy that have historically been very important to the culture of the bank. ACIRRT (1994) note that branch manager and assistant manager roles have represented important positions aspirationally for junior staff. As Reinecke (1988) notes, from the period of the 1960s right through to the 1980s, entry level recruits to the bank have traditionally been high school certificate level. Ascendancy to branch manager level positions within the bank was believed to be the most desirable outcome of working in a bank, but also a realistic and achievable outcome of bank work. A range of researchers have noted the strength of this bank culture to men, particularly men who entered the bank without a degree or formal qualification, other than a higher school certificate (Atkinson 2002; Pascall, Parker and Evetts 2000).

Wider restructuring within the banking sector, the CBA included, shows that the course of the traditional career path had been significantly altered in the last fifteen years. It has been argued that, for employees without formal qualification, they face a number of challenges in terms of maintaining strong long term career prospects in the industry (Atkinson 2002). There is certainly statistical evidence (both internal workforce data and sector wide data) that shows the banking sector has experienced a kind of 'managerialisation', in which higher levels of skill and professionalisation are required across the sector.



The following tables (11 through 13) give an indication of the degree of change that has occurred throughout the Commonwealth bank, during the period in which the focus group data was collected. Tables 11 and 12 provide raw workforce data, and are included largely for reference. Table 13 summarises these trends, and shows a distinct shift in the 'male culture' of the bank. Firstly, in the period directly preceding the interviews, the bank workforce appears to be becoming even more feminised. In only three years, the proportion of the women employed in the bank grew from 62 per cent to 65 percent. This growth has also not just occurred among part time workers. The proportion of full time positions occupied by women has also grown.

**Table 11 CBA workforce, hours arrangements by sex, 1996-1999**

Year	Men		Total men	Women			All employees
	Part time	Full time		Part time	Full time	Total women	
1996	557	12 900	13 457	6892	15 306	22 198	35 655
1997	516	12 757	13 273	6796	15 539	22 335	35 608
1998	626	11 277	12 312	12 564	14 867	21 681	33 993
1999	526	9 305	10 273	11 428	12 816	18 959	29 232

Source: Equal Opportunity for Women in the Workplace Agency (EOWA) Affirmative Action Reports lodged by the CBA 1996-1999.

**Table 12 CBA workforce, occupational classifications by sex, 1996-1999**

Occupational level	1996		1997		1998		1999	
	Women	Men	Women	Men	Women	Men	Women	Men
Senior execs & execs	48	876	62	923	60	792	75	743
Managerial & assist managerial	4728	7805	5215	7876	5300	6783	5306	6181
General class	10279	3792	9958	3459	8911	2907	7414	2354
Graduate	87	82	84	96	64	72	21	27
Unallocated	104	192	154	228	532	722	429	705
Other	60	153						
Total full time	15306	12900	15473	12582	14867	11276	13245	10010

Source: Equal Opportunity for Women in the Workplace Agency (EOWA) Affirmative Action Reports lodged by the CBA 1996-1999.



One of the most significant aspects of change relates to the strong infiltration of women to the managerial segment of the occupational hierarchy. When the distribution of women's employment is considered across the bank, the proportion of all women workers employed in managerial (excluding executive positions) grew from 38 to 46 per cent. Similarly, the proportion of women employed in any management position across the bank (inclusive of non executive positions) grew from 31 to 40 per cent. Although women are clearly still under-represented among managers, the experience of women does appear to reflect a transformation that is 'managerialist'. When changes in the occupational profile of men workers across the bank is considered, the trend is very different. Of all men employed across the bank, the proportion of men occupying managerial positions has remained fairly static. Over the period of observation with which this thesis is concerned, women have achieved significant inroads to assistant manager and manager positions.

**Table 13      CBA workforce, summarised impact of restructuring, 1996-1999**

	1996	1997	1998	1999
<b>Aggregate level of gender saturation</b>				
Women workers as proportion of CBA workforce (%)	62	63	64	65
Women workers as proportion of total full time workforce (%)	54	55	57	58
<b>Gender saturation by occupation</b>				
Women as proportion of full time managers (non-executive only)	38	40	44	46
Proportion of women in full time management roles (executive and non-executive)(%)	31	34	36	40
Proportion of men in full time management roles (executive and non-executive) (%)	60	63	60	62
<b>Hours arrangements</b>				
Part time workers as a proportion of all CBA workforce (%)	21	21	39	41
Women part time workers, as proportion of total part time workforce (%)	92.5	93	95	96

This local workplace-level picture is a microcosm of wider changes in the occupational profile of the finance sector that have occurred over the course of the last ten years. One of the most significant changes has been an ‘upskilling’ of the workforce. ABS employment statistics for the finance sector, indicate a significant change. Table 14 includes figures for 1998 and 2002 and shows that among white collar employees, increases can be observed across all of the higher skill clerical categories. As a proportion of all white collar employees, the proportion of managers in the sector increased marginally. The proportion of professionals and advanced clerical workers also grew over this period. The most significant change was recorded for associate professionals who grew by 7 per cent in this period. The trend is even more striking when compared with changes that have occurred at the bottom end of the white collar occupational hierarchy. The proportion of intermediate clerical workers employed across the sector declined by more than 10 per cent over the six years to 2002.

**Table 14 Finance sector white collar employees 1998 and 2002**

Occupation	1998		2002	
	Raw	%	Raw	%
Managers and administrators	16 877	5.3	20 591	6.1
Professionals	40 950	12.8	55 310	16.3
Associate professionals	64 957	20.3	91 254	27
Advanced clerical and service workers	40 703	12.7	51 837	15.3
Intermediate clerical, sales and service workers	149 862	46.8	119 546	35.3
Elementary clerical, sales and service workers	6 949	2.2	411	<1
TOTAL	320 298	100	338 949	100

Source: Unpublished labour force data, drawn from ABS Labour Force 6203.

Supplied by Finance Sector Union.

This is highly significant when considered in the context of other evidence, provided by the FSU, on the changing skill profile of the sector. The FSU, relying on unpublished data from the ABS Transition from Education to Work survey, states that between 1996 and 1999 alone, the proportion of workers in the finance and insurance sector who held a bachelor or higher degree grew from less than 20 per cent to 24 per cent (FSU 2002). In large scale labour market studies undertaken overseas, this appears to be a trend which is characterising the entire labour market and is not specific to banking. Keep's research (2000) in the UK notes that 30 per cent of graduates take employment into fields and occupations in which the work previously required no formal qualification. For workers who entered sectors such as banking without a degree, this clearly places them at significant risk in terms of future career prospects.

The loss of so many branches, Australia wide, means that the competition for branch manager positions has become much more intense and that ascendancy to a branch manager role is no longer a 'rite of passage' achieved by commitment to the bank, and by climbing incremental and reliable steps in the hierarchy.

#### **4.6.1 Loss of status**

For those managers remaining in the branch structure, there are strong indications that restructuring has significantly altered working life and eliminated some elements of work that have historically been very meaningful for branch manager roles.

The branch manager as a 'leader' within the branch had lost some significance. This loss can be illustrated in at least two important changes. Firstly, the level of autonomy associated with branch manager positions has diminished. Branch managers maintain little, if any, discretion over decisions to appoint staff (on either a permanent or short term basis) and have little input to the decision making processes to determine these outcomes. Branch managers do not meet regularly



with area managers over personnel and staffing unless it is part of a wider planning process.

Secondly, the discretionary judgements of branch managers *as managers* appear to have declined in importance. A number of factors have contributed to this change. The power of retail branch managers to influence performance appraisal outcomes for junior staff is reduced in the current environment. Technological advancements mean that the use of electronic monitoring devices have, in some senses, supplanted monitoring tasks undertaken by managers. Electronic monitoring can record the amount of 'log on' time of an individual team member (when a team member enters a log identification and pass word – similar to those used by call centres). This 'log on' time can record how long a worker has taken to complete any transaction, in effect, the time taken to 'serve a customer'. In effect, area office managers can determine whether they feel a staff member is making an adequate contribution to the bottom line of the business by analyzing the number of customers served, the number of accounts opened, the number (and size) of loans achieved by a particular worker. In many cases, this determination can be made without the area manager having ever even observed the staff member at work. In contrast, the branch manager who has spent most time understanding the way in which individual staff members interact with and deal with customers (in other words evaluating their ability to perform) have become much less relevant. While workers and managers alike expressed reservation about the accuracy of these monitoring methods (during the course of the focus groups), nonetheless, the methods appear highly valued by senior level managers (area office level) within the bank.

Thirdly, the implementation and standardization of this technology has undermined the status and 'distinctiveness' of branch manager contributions to customer service. The monitoring and global database systems now in place within the bank, otherwise known as SIMS software are, are now widely used in corporations both in Australia, US and the UK. Organisations use these systems

so that performance data across individual operating units can be compared, and the organization can be restructured and downsized so that high performing units are maintained. These software systems have played a critical role in many organizational restructuring programs as the systems immediately expose statistical data on networks or sections that are low performers and can be used to “*cut out duplication or ineffectual units quickly*” (Sennett 1998: 48). For branch managers in retail banking, the use of these technologies represents a further way in which the bank now fails to recognize their efforts as managers. While retail managers at one time felt valued because of their distinctive contribution to a region, and were seen as building a bank profile in a geographical area, the distinctive elements of this manager role as both distinctive and local, appear less valued by the bank.

#### **4.7 Agreement making at the Commonwealth Bank**

This section introduces the industrial context in which the managerial workers at the heart of this study are located. The restructuring environment within CBA (just described) might be characterized by a greater level of isolation and dismantling of managerial roles, so too does the bargaining environment reflect this uncertainty and segregation of managers within the bank.

The bank managers and assistant managers observed during the course of this thesis have had the terms and conditions of their employment covered by a stream of enterprise agreement making that commenced in 1993. The first federal certified agreement for these workers was struck in 1993, with new agreements negotiated with the Finance Sector Union and the Commonwealth Bank on a two to three year rotation. The enterprise agreements for these workers are as follows:

- Commonwealth Bank of Australia Enterprise Bargaining Agreement 1993.
- Commonwealth Bank of Australia Enterprise Bargaining Agreement 1996.
- Commonwealth Bank of Australia Enterprise Bargaining Agreement 1998.
- Commonwealth Bank of Australia Customer Service Division Enterprise Bargaining Agreement 2000.

- Commonwealth Bank of Australia Retail Banking Enterprise Bargaining Agreement 2002.

Throughout this period, a number of awards have also been maintained which run parallel to the enterprise agreements covering the working arrangements for these workers. It should be noted that enterprise agreements have been used as the focus of this analysis, because they are the primary tool of regulation with regard to determining the working arrangements for staff. Consistent with the terms of the *Commonwealth Workplace Relations Act 1996*, in the event of any discrepancy between the award and the agreement, the agreement overrides the award. Each of the agreements identified above include a clause to this effect *“This agreement will be read and interpreted wholly in conjunction with the Award provided that where there is any inconsistency between this Agreement and the Award, this agreement will prevail to the extent of the inconsistency”* (Clause 6 of CBA 1998 agreement: 4).

#### **4.7.1 Decentralising and dismantling collective bargaining**

The industrial environment in which these focus groups were conducted (1998-1999) was heated. Negotiations between the FSU and the Bank over the 2000 agreement became deadlocked on several occasions. A number of branch level strikes occurred Australia wide during the period of negotiation. Senior union officials also released statements indicating that they too, had witnessed a weakening in the bargaining position of the union, and publicly expressed less confidence in the ability of enterprise bargaining to serve the interests and concerns of bank workers. National secretary of the FSU, Tony Beck announced an intention by the union to return to industry wide bargaining in 2000 (in line with the ACTU's newly formed policy on enterprise bargaining), but also because the bargaining crisis between the FSU and the CBA administration had become virtually unworkable.



At the time the focus groups were convened (1999), the 1998 agreement was workplace-wide and covered the majority of permanent employees. The 1998 enterprise agreement was in fact, the last blanket agreement certified for the Commonwealth Bank workforce. Since this time however, the CBA has progressively isolated the customer service division workers from the wider bank workforce by instituting a more devolved model of agreement making. As of 2000, bank administration struck separate agreements with the banking call centres (the Direct Banking agreement), information technology workers and processing centres (Technology, Operations and Property Agreement) and retail branch workers (Customer Service Centre Agreements). These difficulties have intensified since the 2000 agreement, and the Commonwealth Bank has continued to pursue an aggressive program of 'decentralization' of its agreement making processes.

Most recently, the CBA has required retail branch workers to negotiate an agreement which is distinct from the wider customer service division.

#### **4.7.2 Supplanting collective bargaining**

There is strong evidence that the bank has sought to dismantle and supplant collective bargaining processes with more individual forms of agreement making. The bank has run a strong campaign to recruit groups of workers across the CBA to Australian Workplace Agreements (AWAs). In 2000, the FSU won an injunction to stop the CBA from offering AWAs to employees covered by the award. The CBA had issued letters to several hundred CBA managers (sent directly to their homes) offering an opportunity to sign an AWA, and abandon their current collective enterprise agreement. As deputy general manager of the CBA, and head of human resources, John Matthews stated in 2000 "*We've always thought that in the long run we'd end up with everyone on individual arrangements. It's part of building our one on one relationships*" (Matthews 2000). The court found in favour of the union, arguing that the bank was using coercion to induce members to sign individual contracts (Workplace Express 2000a). Justice Raymond Finkelstein stated in his judgement that "*If it is not*

*intentional in the sense of being deliberate, it at least strikes me as reckless*" (Workplace Express 2000b).

It should be noted that not all Commonwealth Bank managerial employees within the retail bank network are covered by the same agreement. The campaign to recruit managers to the AWA making process commenced as early as 1997 (very soon after the *Workplace Relations Act*). During the course of the focus groups, managers reported having received letters from the bank administration prior to the formation of the 1998 collective agreement. There are no publicly available figures that indicate the proportion of Commonwealth Bank staff who are covered by AWAs.

#### **4.8 Conclusion**

This chapter has introduced the powerful influence that restructuring has had on the lives of managerial workers within the CBA, over the period of observation with which this thesis is concerned. For these managers, the perceived 'attack' on the status, responsibilities and traditional roles of the 'manager' has created a sense of career and professional crisis for managers. The next chapter will look in detail at the focus group material to identify the main issues which men and women identify to be the priorities for the enterprise agreement making process. These priorities will then be considered and compared in the light of claims made by previous research that men's and women's preferences will be distinctly different.

## **Chapter five      Key problems to be addressed by the agreement: a shared state of crisis**

### **5.1      Introduction**

The previous chapter (four) provided information about the workplace context, the restructuring milieu within the Commonwealth Bank, and the impact for managerial roles. Over the next chapters, this thesis turns to analysis of the impacts of this restructuring for managers, and suggests a possible framework for understanding the responses of both men and women managers in dealing with this crisis. This chapter (five) will identify the key areas of concern arising from this restructuring process, that women and men feel should feature as the priority for upcoming enterprise agreement negotiations. The following chapter (six) will present a conceptual framework which can be used to understand the position of men and women managers, and chapter seven will use this typology in its analysis of specific preferences.

This chapter will directly address two key assumptions pertaining to marginalisation, which have underlied previous research in this field. Researchers have argued that men and women will advance distinctly different preferences in the *content* of enterprise agreements, and the defining points of this difference will hinge on household and unpaid work roles undertaken by women. In other words, women are more likely to advance preferences that seek to resolve tensions that exist between the competing priorities of home and work life. Secondly, previous research has suggested that women are less likely to assert themselves in the context of enterprise bargaining. The role of gender socialisation which encourages women to be less assertive, and 'consensus builders' will mean that the adversarial nature of much bargaining will leave women at a distinct disadvantage.

### **5.2      Significance of nominating preferences**

Researchers note the important role of unions in mediating, filtering and ultimately negotiating the issues of priority for the constituencies of members they represent (Cooper 2002; Houston 1996). At this point in time, there is



little or no research examining how workers at the individual (psychological level) determine the 'logs of claims' or the catalogue of concerns that are the basis of negotiation for enterprise agreements (Forbes-Mewitt and Griffin 2003; Fells 1995). There is however, a wider body of literature on the notion of 'choice', which seeks to understand how workers construct and resolve choices between competing alternatives. Previous literature on 'choices' at work indicates that preferences, by their very nature, are constrained and have emerged from some form of compromise. Chapter four of this thesis demonstrates that the bank does not represent an environment in which either the 'ideal choices' of men or women employees for their working arrangements are likely to be satisfied. In this context, preferences can only be understood, when the environment in which the preferences are formed is also understood.

The notion of context-specific preferences is present within many fields of study. As early as the 1950s, sociologists coined the term 'constrained choice' (Lindblom 1959) to describe the complexities and compromises present within all preference conundrums. Researchers in the field of organizational culture have also identified this literature on choice and preference as providing insight to the experience of workers. Pascall, Parker and Evetts (2000) note that a preference for a working arrangement (for example the decision to seek or defer a promotional opportunity within an organization) represents only a 'best fit' of the options available at a single point in time. In other words, preferences are not static, so it is important to understand the constraints under which the preference has been formed (Pascall et al 2000), as well as the substance and content of the preference itself. In other words, analysis of the environment surrounding the preference will reveal as much about the reasons for a particular preference, as it does any analysis of the internal decision making processes of the individual agent. Researchers such as Sennett (1998) position worker 'choice' and 'preference' only in the context of culturally supplied information and local context. This argument is posited by other researchers (Kunda 1992) in the context of specific workplace settings (Kunda focused on engineering workplaces). For these researchers, context and

environment are all important, and internal decision-making processes of individual agents are much less relevant to explanations of choice.

### 5.2.1 Enterprise agreement as ‘antidote’

The focus group discussions reveal that the men and women participants appeared to be acutely aware of the constraints and difficulties they faced in pursuing their next collective enterprise agreement. This awareness had created a sense of desperation among the participants, and contributed to the belief that they collectively occupied a significantly weakened bargaining position, compared to the bargaining position they had felt historically. Under these circumstances, interviewees argued that the highest priority for the upcoming agreement must be to solve the problems at greatest crisis point, with any other issues left for future agreements down the track. In other words, participants were not focused on subtle enhancements or refinements to the agreement that might help to improve the quality of life, rather, the workers argued that the workplace was in ‘haemorrhage’. The enterprise agreement, it was argued, had a role, in the words of one participant “*in damage control*”, or in the words of another manager “*it’s important to save what we have*”.

The focus groups revealed that restructuring had produced a wide range of unfavourable outcomes for the lives of workers. Some examples include long hours, heightened levels of stress, less satisfying work, lower level of morale at work, and an increased sense of competitiveness between colleagues. There was strong consensus among both men and women that the agreement had failed to maintain relevance on one fundamental workplace problem – excessive workload. The interviews of both women and men reveal that the burden of work affected every aspect of working life for these managers. Without exception (at every focus group), the discussion circled around how this key problem might be unravelled so that all of the problems currently created by it, might be solved. The following two quotes are representative of this recurring sentiment across the focus group discussions:



*"This needs to be stopped, and now! It is no good having more and more in the agreement which means less and less in reality. The sheer volume of work has got to be addressed. Simple as that!"* (Man manager: focus group 5).

*"We can't keep going on like this...a solid agreement that can actually challenge the workload problem has got to be the focus...It [overwork] is primary to all of the stuff that is going on in our lives, it is undermining anything we try to achieve at work"* (Woman manager: focus group 9).

These comments demonstrate how the role of the enterprise agreement is perceived as an 'antidote' to the network of problems created by excessive workload. In other words, both men and women clearly entered the focus group with a clear intention to ensure unity, and achieve consensus, driven by a sense of desperation to identify enterprise agreement solutions able to solve the issues at greatest crisis point.

### **5.3 Key problems to be addressed by the next enterprise agreement**

Discontent with the 1998 enterprise agreement, expressed by women and men managers alike, appeared to stem directly from the level of overwork experienced. As noted in the methodology chapter, a total of 223 men and women participated in the focus group interviews. Also noted by chapter two, at the conclusion of each focus group, participants were asked to indicate their support (vote) for the key preferences they had for the upcoming agreement. The most striking observation that can be made about the key preferences advanced by each focus group is the strong consistency between both men and women, between well established and newer members of staff, over the key problems facing the workforce. Across all eighteen focus groups, three key issues were supported *unanimously* as the main problems needing resolution by the upcoming agreement. Three concerns dominated the discussion of both women and men: understaffing; problems with the performance appraisal scheme in place; and insufficient employer support for training. If these three problems could be resolved by the agreement, it was argued, it would provide an 'antidote' to the unfavourable working conditions currently faced by the managerial workforce. In each of the three issues to be discussed, the nomination of these issues has clearly been driven by the need to identify the pivotal workplace concern that has created the network of problems.



### 5.3.1 Staffing

From the point of view of managers, the impact of bank decisions to downsize and limit numbers of new recruits to retail branches had severely impacted the ability to meet workload targets at the branch level. Staffing, (that is, the aggregate number of staff provided to branches) was a resounding problem across the bank. It was argued that this problem was basic and endemic to almost all other difficulties that staff had faced in the bank over the last few years. The following comments were extremely common, and demonstrate the pervasiveness of the understaffing problem.

*“Staffing – everything comes down to staffing levels”* (Man manager: focus group 7).

*“Every centre is trying to do something to make it work, to deal with the workload and the lack of staff, and they are all crashing I think”* (Woman manager: focus group 14).

*“We can’t make it happen without adequate staffing either - we wish that we could ‘make it happen’, but we can’t”* (Man manager: focus group 10).

*“Staffing - that would be the biggest and most obvious thing that needs to be fixed”* (Woman manager: focus group 10).

### 5.3.2 Performance appraisal

There was a strong level of discontent among managerial staff about the system currently used to appraise the performance of staff, and managers nominated the issue of performance appraisal as a cornerstone workplace problem requiring redress by the upcoming enterprise agreement. Criticisms of the system came from managers both as ‘appraisors’ but also as ‘appraisees’ within the system. It is important to note that staff did not generally voice objection to the notion of performance assessment, in principle, for either themselves or more junior staff. These two quotes have been selected because they are representative of the general tenet of the discussions on the need to revise the performance appraisal system.

*"There is a constant emphasis on the bottom line. This includes not only achieving targets but not losing loans and the value of the loans written. This is good in one way because the emphasis is on the bottom line of the loan general ledger. But it does not reflect the service responsibilities of the job, and the notion of service as the most important part of the job is not valued by the bank. This is fundamental, or at least it should be, to everything we do"* (Man manager: focus group 3).

*"No one objects to the notion of performance monitoring. But the way the system is currently operating is not fair to staff, and I don't believe it is giving them the information they really need anyway. I would have serious doubts about the accuracy of the information they get. It really fails on both counts"* (Woman manager: focus group 6).

The problems expressed by managers with regard to performance management, were highly focused on the role of targets as a key plank of the appraisal system. Staff argued that the implementation of targets had heightened the 'intensity' of work. In other words, targets created an environment in which the pace of work was extreme, with workers only given a very tight narrow of time to meet highly specific goals.

*"...performance appraisal is not the real problem. My greater concern is the targets. The targets are so unreasonable given the time constraints. It puts a layer of pressure on everything, and sets the tone throughout the day that I don't think anyone likes. It affects the way we treat each other and how we have to work..."* (Woman manager: focus group 6).

*"Targets have always been there but now they are daily and monthly instead of annually and therefore much more weight is put on them. There is constant daily pressure instead of six monthly targets. It is a relentless and unforgiving pressure that doesn't help performance, that's for sure"* (Man manager: focus group 4).

The impact of targets on increasing the intensity of work, across a broad spectrum of managerial and non-managerial occupations was also clear. A high level of criticism was observable from managers, representing every division of retail banking within the bank - retail branches, customer service teams, lending teams, personal and mobile banking, and business banking. Customer service workers and tellers were affected by the daily expectations associated with referrals, and conversion of referrals to successful 'wins' for loans or accounts. These quotes describe the problems created by targets across the range of positions within the bank.

*"The targets that operate in my area are impossible. It is tough for all staff. Tellers need to get 4 referrals, which CSOs have to convert at a 60% conversion rate"* (Woman manager – customer service: focus group 2).

*"We need to get a certain amount of personal approvals, term deposits... The problem is that it's not cumulative. It is every week. So it doesn't matter if you have a really great week – you could make \$1 million in one week – it doesn't count. The bank makes no allowance for that. Or the fact that there are public holidays either!"* (Man manager – personal banking: focus group 5).

*"Investment was not always like this... I used to share a job with another person... We found that she did certain parts of the job better than I did, and I did other parts well. So she worked on her strengths and I worked on mine. At the end of the day we went to the manager and said, this is what we have done for the performance review. You just won't be able to do that kind of thing anymore. She has left now, and I still have those same targets we shared"* (Woman manager – credit: focus group 9).

*"I had my PFR targets downloaded to me yesterday, and before I left the office today they had been increased. So I need to personally get 335 000 new dollars to the branch every week".* (Man manager – personal banking: focus group 9).

*"...it's even so bad that some tellers who make extra sales... will keep those extra sales up their sleeves to make it easier to make the sales for the coming week"* (Woman manager – retail branch: focus group 2).

For managers, the cumulative impact of these targets was strong. The performance or ranking of managers, was determined by *all* staff successfully meeting their individual targets. While both men and women managers voiced



criticism of this system, these quotes provide particularly useful descriptive detail of how this experience manifested for managers in particular.

*“Managers got their arses kicked in this area lately because we did not meet the targets...That’s what happens when things go pear shaped...later on it was discovered in a internal investigation that the ‘star’ branches had been cheating on their figures. But, we were still in trouble and top management refused to acknowledge that their ‘stars’ had been cheating, they were still put on a pedestal...”* (Man manager – retail branch: focus group 1).

*“As a manager you must meet all targets. You are responsible for individuals not meeting theirs as well as your own and the branches. The previous system had room for interpretation – for example there may have been a week when you did not have enough staff and so this would be factored into the equation. But it is not now”* (Man manager – retail branch: focus group 2).

*“In our region there is the yellow duck. If any branch manager doesn’t get a financial services referral - within a week - they are awarded the yellow duck. The manager gets the duck to take back to the branch to shame staff into getting referrals the next week. It is an area office thing for our area, it’s not done in other areas. It is funny, but also serious I think, because the manager is a bit embarrassed to bring the duck back to the branch to show to all staff”* (Woman assistant manager: focus group 3).

*“You are the bottom line...It is part and parcel of your responsibility as a manager. You are answerable, and people look to you for direction...it also means you experience the problems associated with the system most intensely. I really feel it is unique because your work responsibilities are the end product of a long chain of problems”* (Woman manager: focus group 12).

### **5.3.3 Training**

Managers argued that staff did not perceive proper training. The problems expressed with training related to frequency, content and the ability to actually attend training (by being released from normal duties). Firstly, managers noted that restructuring and cost cutting meant the bank provided less training than it had in the past. As the following quotes show, this meant that training programs were provided less frequently, and in some cases entire training programs had been cut back altogether (for example, formal induction and orientation programs had been abolished in retail banking).

*“When we started we literally spent months on the job being a shadow of another staff member. You really needed to learn the ropes properly and*

*learn all the systems before you were allowed to process a pretty simple customer request” (Male manager focus group 1).*

*“Training was much more available and it was common practice. Now the bank just does not see it as being their role” (Woman manager focus group 12).*

Secondly, managers argued that the training itself (when provided) was inadequate. The content of training did not really equip staff with the knowledge and skills necessary to undertake basic duties associated with their job role.

*“The training they give us on new products is absolutely hopeless. A customer could tell us more about the product, just from reading the pamphlet. (Woman manager: focus group 2).*

*“It is just absurd. A bloody video does not make a training program...and some of it is just some American guy...it is sales hype...that is what they call training! It doesn't actually help you on a day to day basis, actually understand what the job involves and how we need to do it” (Male manager focus group 16).*

Managers raised a third reservation related to the accessibility of training. Much of the lack of access to training was attributed to the working environment. In this sense, problems associated with training were perceived to be symptomatic of the two other key problems – understaffing and performance appraisal. The pressures and intensity of work meant that staff were reluctant to leave work to attend training, and that managers admitted they were reluctant to release staff to attend training.

*“I know [junior staff member] wants to go on that training program. But what can I do? I can't let him go if I don't have someone able to fill that spot while he's away. And that may not happen for a while” (Woman manager: focus group 10).*

*“...when someone gets promoted or they leave, their seat remains empty for minimum five or six weeks and then the new arrival doesn't know the job and they're put in a position where no one knows the job. They just pick up the phone and learn as they go. That's the way it is. You got the promotion, you work out the job” (Woman manager: focus group 11).*

*"It still comes down to a lack of staff, if you don't have a lack of staff you then have a person to train them. Lack of staff, lack of training. It's all under one banner"* (Man manager: focus group 10)

#### **5.4 Marginalisation of women: testing some assumptions**

This section will address some key assumptions pertaining to women's marginalisation while participating in enterprise bargaining. Firstly, the literature review identifies that previous research has assumed women will be more likely to mobilise preferences in a way that seeks to alleviate tensions between work and home life. In other words, women will be oriented towards the nomination of family-specific clauses in agreements. Secondly, the literature review notes that women will be less likely to be assertive, engage in militancy and be confrontational in the context of bargaining. The content of family-specific clause preferences will make women 'marginal' to many bargaining campaigns. This, it is argued, places women at a distinct disadvantage.

##### **5.4.1 Men and women managers: the role of the family in preference determination**

The tensions and conflicts that can emerge for women as a result of the negotiating and balancing priorities at work and priorities at home have been well documented. Pocock has described it as a 'work/life collision' (2003), while others have described these constraints as a 'juggle' (Bittman 1993), a 'time bind' (Hochschild 1997), a process of 'weaving' (Garey 1999) or a 'tangled web' (Jarvis 1999). Although, some have criticised the almost exclusive preoccupation with women in the context of these discussions (Thornthwaite 2001), nevertheless the majority of literature places women's preferences alone, at the centre of these debates.

There is evidence that working time and working condition preferences among women are not uniform. Much of this literature is premised on the theme that different women seek different equilibriums or acceptable 'compromises' in the negotiation of choices with regard to working time. A comprehensive theory, built exclusively around the preference dilemma for women, is developed by Hakim (2000). This theory notes the link between labour



market outcomes for women (the range and variety of different working arrangements worked by women), and the preferences for women to use different strategies to resolve the conflict between work and home. Hakim (2000)'s theory suggests a taxonomy 'of women' which can be defined by three distinct preference groups – those women who prefer home-based work, those who prefer a combination of paid and unpaid work, and those whose primary preference is paid work.

For other researchers, there is also a recognition that women's preferences in working time and associated entitlements are not uniform. Early work by Hochschild (1997) notes that negotiations within the home, shape women's preferences and 'inclination' for particular work arrangements. Similarly, researchers such as Bittman and Pixley (1997) note the social and financial circumstances of the family as important in shaping preferences, particularly the choices that shape women's availability for, and access to, paid work opportunities. Higgins, Duxbury and Johnson (2000) for example, note a critical distinction between 'earner' women and 'career' women, and argue that preferences for part time work and shorter working hours across these different value orientations, may be driven by very different motives.

Hakim's work, has been criticised for offering too 'static' an account of the categories of choice. More recently, research conducted by Morehead (2003) argues that the impact of negotiations within the home (between parents and carers) needs to be understood in terms of its impact on work-based choices and preferences. Morehead (2003) suggests underlying 'gendered parenting ideologies' can explain both the variation in work and family outcomes, and across the perception of choice among women. While these different taxonomies suggest that the structure and environment of 'choice' is not equal among women, all of this research still primarily places the household at the centre of all discussions and interpretations of preferences.

The significance of this research, and its implications for bargaining are difficult to determine. While it is clear that the allocation of time between home and work life is informed by critical negotiations that occur within the

home, the qualitative evidence provided by this thesis also shows that enterprise agreement preferences are also clearly informed strongly by workplace-specific factors. While the issue of strain between work and family was noted by both men and women bank managers alike, the proposition that these tensions would be solved most effectively by including a family-focused 'intervention' in the enterprise agreement was not advanced by women or men.

A fundamental observation that can be made about the preferences of these women and men managers, is that women's areas of concern (key or generic preference areas) were not distinctly different from men's. Further to this, rather than sideline women's concerns about the detrimental impact of current working arrangements on family life, men concurred strongly that the understaffing crisis had created unachievable work schedules for most staff. The complement of work assigned for each officer was argued to be unreasonable, and that this had created a number of flow-on effects personally for staff. Both men and women argued that the extended hours that most staff were expected to work was not conducive to a happy and healthy family life.

*"The long hours do not accommodate family life at all"* (Woman manager: focus group 12).

*"It's like the bank says, it is just not a nine to five job anymore. You just can't afford to leave at five anymore because the work is piling up, and you know it will be really frowned upon. So much for any plans you might have for after work, let alone quality time with kids"* (Man manager: focus group 5).

*"I work a couple of hours of overtime each week. I come in early in the morning when the phones are quiet and I can actually get some work done. I do not ask for overtime, I have to do it to get my job done though"* (Woman manager: focus group 10).

*"If I knew I was getting paid a bit extra for all that overtime I've worked, I **might** think it was worthwhile. Having that bonus to put away for the kids and their education maybe, or just to pay for a nice holiday away. But as it stands,*

*I am working the hours, and missing out on the time with the kids, and getting nothing to show for it* (Man manager: focus group 5).

Although staff felt the workload to be unreasonable, they also described their obligations to meet the heavy workloads, often in a short timeframe. This has led to long daily hours, and an overwhelming number of staff reported they worked overtime on a daily and weekly basis (unpaid). Both men and women also noted that the amount of overtime and the stressful conditions at work (created through targets and performance pressure) had meant that many could not happily spend time at home or with family entirely free of the stress at work.

*“Most of us are going home stressed to the max. Our family life is nowhere. We wake up the next morning and think ‘oh god, I have to go back in there again’* (Man manager: focus group 9).

*“I have been so unpleasant to be around at home, I know it”* (Woman manager: focus group 17).

*“I wake up at 4am. You are never really free of it...it does not make for an involved and happy family life”* (Man manager: focus group 12).

*“I have to take paper work home often, and I get so cranky with the kids. Every time I snap I wish I hadn’t, but there are days when it all seems too much”* (Woman manager: focus group 10).

It is important to note that while the negative implications or consequences arising from work had implications for family, these consequences were weighed or assessed in a wider context. The family-related impacts were among a number of problems perceived to be associated with the working time arrangements in the bank. For example, negative morale impacts associated with understaffing, targets, and a lack of training were also emphasised as being important consequences arising from these key workplace problems.

*“When you have too much to do yourself, it does not create a team work environment...people do not back each other up, they tend to walk away rather than pitch in and help”* (Man manager; focus group 10).

*“I think a lot of staff feel defeated because they don’t know what to do, and the bank is not helping them get up to speed”* (Woman manager: focus group 11).



*"These targets are having the opposite effect to what the bank had planned...when you feel something is unachievable, it doesn't make you try harder, it just encourages you to give up".* (Woman manager: focus group 2).

Equally, the issue of workplace stress was also perceived to be an unacceptable consequence of poor conditions at work, largely attributed to understaffing, a lack of training and targets.

*"...it does seem harder to unwind these days..."* (Woman manager: focus group 8).

*"I drink more now than I have at any other time in my life"* (Man manager: focus group 11).

*"I know of staff that have had to take leave, to get time away because the pressure is so intense...but these staff would not admit it was stress leave for fear of retribution from the bank"* (Woman manager: focus group 1).

This thesis argues that, for these managers, a better balance between family and work life was a priority, but not a pre-eminent force driving the enterprise agreement preferences expressed by either men or women in the current round of negotiation. Rather, poor work/family balance, poor morale and work-related stress were perceived to be unsustainable consequences arising from the failure of the bank to provide an acceptable set of conditions at work. As abhorrent as these consequences were seen to be by the workforce, their reactions in dealing with these crises were essentially 'reactive'. Most importantly, neither women nor men advanced family-specific provisions as the most appropriate response by the enterprise agreement. In other words, understaffing, a lack of training and targets needed to be resolved as key workplace problems because the flow on effects arising from these issues were multitudinous.

It is important to note that the persistence of tensions associated with family and work life remain among these workers, despite a seemingly high level of bank commitment to family-friendly working time. Using a conventional methodology, based on incidence of family-friendly clauses, the Equal Opportunity for Women in the Workplace Agency (EOWA) has found the agreements in both the banking sector and particularly the CBA to be highly

responsive to what have traditionally been considered 'heartland' women's issues. The CBA had a job share program, facility to telecommute associated with some positions, and flexible start and finish times associated with a range of positions. The CBA had also expanded the aggregate number of, and access to permanent part time work arrangements across the bank. The EOWA has awarded the CBA the annual equal opportunity for the workplace award twice in the last eight years, and has short-listed the organisation as a finalist for a number of years also. The CBA was also granted an exemption from the legislative requirement to provide affirmative action or equal opportunity reports for a period of three years. In reality, the working arrangements described by both women and men at the CBA at the time of interview, were far from family-friendly.

The qualitative evidence provided in these focus groups shows remarkably strong areas of consensus in the key workplace problems facing both men and women managers. Across all of the eighteen focus groups, women and men consistently argued that agreement reform needed to occur in three key areas – training, understaffing and performance appraisal. The inclusion of provisions expanding access to family-related forms of leave however, did not arise in the discussion groups at any point in time. This finding does give support for other research that suggests that the driving force for preferences can be derived from a number of sources. So, while long working hours may clearly have detrimental impacts for caring responsibilities, this consequence may, in reality, not be the primary reason behind a lobby to change these hours.

Hogarth, Hasluck, Pierre, Winterbotham and Vivien note in a study on work and family preferences in the UK *"Many employees also expressed an interest in working from home, although few mentioned family responsibilities as one of the reasons, and for the most part, their reasons related instead to efficiency concerns"* (2000: 24).

The way in which family-specific provisions, and the way in which focus group discussions on the impact of poor working conditions have had on family is supported by other research findings. In particular, Probert, Whiting and Ewer's (2000a) work in the finance sector also makes a contribution.



Probert et al's interviews with workers in the finance industry in Australia, found that workers were seeking fundamental change in both workplace practices and formal entitlements. Probert et al (2000a) argues that any discussion on work and family, is in some respects removed or peripheral to the central discussion on enterprise bargaining. In other words, family-specific clauses are really 'add ons' which are not perceived as particularly useful to the workforce, when the wider workplace environment in other ways is hostile to employee concerns and interests.

#### **5.4.2 Men and women managers: collusion in agreement breach**

Previous research has suggested that women will engage with enterprise bargaining in an inherently different way to men. In other words, women will be reluctant to assert their preferences, and that women are less likely to be militant (Summers 2003; Bennett 1995; Henry and Franzway 1993). The qualitative evidence of this thesis provides some contrasting findings to other studies on women and enterprise bargaining. Men did not numerically dominate the focus groups. The overall participation of the groups was dominated by women (more than half of all attendees were women). The convenor of the group (facilitator) was not given instructions to lead the areas of discussion, nor prompt on the specific issues that should be discussed. In thirteen of the focus groups, women managers actually spontaneously 'led' the discussion, in the sense of making opening statements and points that commenced or kick-started the discussion topics. Interviewees were able to voice any issues, in effect, to place any issue on the bargaining table which they felt should be the priority to be addressed by the agreement.

Both men and women managers alike shared a deep level of dissatisfaction with the enterprise agreement currently governing the terms and conditions of their employment (The Commonwealth Bank Certified Agreement 1998). Both women and men managers consistently highlighted that restructuring within the bank (over the period of five to eight years) had created a highly unfavourable working environment. The enterprise agreement (EA) had clearly failed to meet the expectations of either men or women managers, and



that both of these workers shared some basic expectations about what protections the EA should provide. Firstly, the EA had failed to provide a sufficient set of conditions to counteract, or even address, the key issues of priority for workers (extended hours, targets & performance management, and downsizing). Secondly, the current EA, while on paper may have provided adequate conditions and protections, in reality it had proved ineffectual because employer prerogative had strengthened in recent years.

The interviews reveal a deep level of cynicism with the employer, evident in the comments provided by both women and women managers. The widespread recognition that the bank was 'hostile' to the interests of staff had left workers in a state of crisis as to how to enact and access already earned entitlements (such as unlimited sick leave, rostered days off (RDOs)), let alone progress EA negotiations to seek further improvements to the state of the agreement. On these issues, women and men showed a strong sense of solidarity both as workers and managers. These quotes give some indication of this sentiment, and were common throughout the course of the focus groups:

*"With the EBA, the bank keeps changing the rules and their boundaries so that we've got to keep chasing them. We all know that they want us not to take the RDOs and get a cash payment for them. And by not supplying the extra staff if makes it extremely difficult to take them"* (Woman manager: focus group 12).

*"There is little, at this point in time at the bank, I could positively put my hand up and say I am happy about it. We work harder and longer than I can ever remember, and there is no recognition for this. I don't feel valued. All of this has occurred in an environment in which our ability to do anything about it has weakened"* (Man manager: focus group 10).

Finally, both men and women managers concur that bank workers face difficult industrial terrain in trying to either reclaim favourable benefits (argued to have been lost in previous rounds of bargaining) or 'stem the tide' by including EA clauses that represent new approaches to the major problems

facing the workforce. The convergence of these events had led the men and women managers interviewed to describe their employment situation as in a state of 'crisis'.

The overwhelming tone of the focus groups could be described as 'powerlessness' on the part of the manager participants. Both women and men managers testified of a hostile working environment, in which they felt immense pressure from more senior management within the bank to conform to workplace behaviour and practice they knew to be in breach of the enterprise agreement terms. Both men and women managers believed they faced little option but to conform to area office pressure (in the form of targets, staff shortages), or face reprisal from the employer (in the form of retrenchment, redundancy, or transfer).

The impact of this pressure on both women and men appears to be very similar, as both described analogous techniques in their response to this pressure. These managers admitted they had, in effect, colluded in the breach of the agreement. Although staff expressed vehement opposition to the amount of work required to be performed (overall workload), and in some respects the content of the work required (the increased sales emphasis in job tasks), both men and women used similar strategies in order to meet these intense demands. An example includes working overtime on a daily basis, but not claiming compensation. At the time of interview, this had become regular workplace practice. As one staff member described it, unpaid overtime "*is at epidemic levels across the bank*". Comments of the following ilk were extremely common across the focus groups.

*"If we didn't do all the unpaid overtime, within a month, the bank would grind to a halt. There are bucket loads of work done as unpaid overtime"* (Man manager).

*"We can't do two jobs and that's what they're asking us to do basically. If someone is away you've gotta cover for them, you've just got to do it"* (Woman manager).

*"It's like the bank says, it is just not a nine to five job anymore. You just can't afford to leave at five anymore because the work is piling up, and you know it will be really frowned upon"* (Man manager).

*"I work a couple of hours of overtime each week. I come in early in the morning when the phones are quiet and I can actually get some work done. I do not ask for overtime, I have to do it to get my job done though"* (Woman manager).

Postponing general administrative and non 'target-related' paperwork to outside of standard working hours was also a strategy used by both men and women managers in order to deal with 'crises' that occurred during the course of the working day including customer problems, meetings called at short notice and staff concerns/queries that required immediate redress. Skipping breaks (lunch for example) in order to meet deadlines was also a time management strategy cited by both women and men.

*"There is now a pile of work I call 'train' work – because that's when I do it – on the train on my way home"* (Woman manager: focus group 12: group C).

*"There is too much to do for one person, and just not enough time...I find I have to take all the material home and nut it out myself before I can say I understand what is involved"* (Woman manager: focus group 12).

*"What lunch break?? That's something that you eat at your desk, but you never actually walk out the door"* (Man manager: focus group 14).

*"I usually bring my lunch from home and work through. It just takes too much time out of the day to queue for a sandwich. I don't have that enough hours in the day for that!"* (Woman manager).



Both women and men managers cited strategies with both the taking of their own leave, and the granting of leave to subordinate staff. Taking only short periods of leave also appeared to help managers deal with the volume of work associated with maintaining knowledge of new banking products from week to week. Both women and men lamented this because they argued they were responsible for, or were being forced by the bank, to prevent or block the access of their junior staff to access their earned entitlements.

*"I can't remember the last time I took a whole month off. You can't take more than a weeks holiday because while you're away the work just piles up on your desk and then it takes months to catch up when you return"* (Man manager: focus group 15).

*"We are honestly bombarded with new products all the time. If I took holidays I want to off, I would come back to a completely different set of products – a totally different landscape"* (Man manager: focus group 6).

*"I find it very difficult to actually take blocks of time off now, because it is just too difficult when you get back"* (woman manager: )

This is an important overarching observation to be made about the common responses of men and women managers to this form of crisis. Previous research in this field has suggested that this kind of pressure might suggest a greater propensity or tenacity among men to challenge and incite industrial action in order to provoke a solution to this crisis. Bennett (1995), Burgmann (1994) and Junor (1995) all note that the bargaining environment is one which has the potential to advantage men because of their greater willingness to challenge and assert themselves. The evidence provided by these workers suggest a shared acceptance of agreement breach, and mutual reluctance to challenge the employer.

The reasons for this shared reluctance to challenge the employer are also revealed by analysis of the focus group interviews. Both women and men managers perceived that employer prerogative at the CBA had grown to such a

degree over this period, that they felt disempowered by the new industrial arrangements, with neither able to lever an advantageous outcome.

Certainly, both men and women managers indicated an acute level of awareness of the provisions of the *Workplace Relations Act 1996*.

Interestingly, only two managers during the course of all the focus groups noted that they had contacted a union directly to complain that the terms of the agreement were in breach. This is despite all 223 participants noting that unpaid overtime had become part of their standard response to an excessive workload. Instead, it appears that both the men and women managers saw that key workplace problems needed to be addressed as a matter of urgency but by the enterprise agreement, not by pursuit of an individual grievance case against the bank. A sense of desperation was apparent in the discussions of the men and women managers, who argued that the agreement must be used in a highly focused, and targeted way.

## **5.5 Conclusion**

This chapter has shown strong areas of consensus in the general areas of concerns expressed by men and women managers in their agreement. The highly competitive nature of the banking environment (noted by the previous chapter) has clearly thrown both women and men into a similar state of crisis about their working lives. This state of crisis has clearly created a sense of urgency, and unity, with both women and men seeking to use the agreement in a highly focused way. The generic preferences expressed by these managers mobilized around common areas of concern – understaffing, training and performance appraisal. The way in which managers described the impact of working time on family life also demonstrates that, while managers were dissatisfied with the balance of these responsibilities, it was not a driving preference force because of other issues considered to be at a more critical crisis point.

The next chapter proposes an alternative framework for understanding the preferences expressed by men and women managers which focuses on the identity of these managers, and how changes to the labour market environment have prompted managers to develop strategies in response to these risks they face in the crisis of their current employment arrangements.



## **Chapter six      The career narrative: identifying a framework for analysis of agreement preferences**

### **6.1      Introduction**

Chapters four and five note a deep level of concern and disquiet among managers in the Commonwealth Bank of Australia (CBA), regarding the state of their current working arrangements. Managers expressed a strong sense of urgency for the enterprise agreement to develop a solution for the shared sense of 'crisis' they faced. This chapter notes research contributions that attempt to explain the behaviour and attitudes of managers who have faced a similar 'career crisis' in their employment. This chapter proposes the conceptual framework of the identity or career 'narrative' as applicable to the analysis of enterprise bargaining preferences. This framework will then be used to better understand the preferences advanced by men and women, and whether the existence of distinctly different career narratives offer an explanation for managers' responses to the problems they face with their working arrangements.

Swart, Kinnie and Purcell (2003) note that widespread organizational restructuring has transformed the experience of work for many managers. Staff and resource cut backs, more intense forms of performance appraisal, and extended hours arrangements have had a detrimental impact on the quality of life experienced by managers and professionals (ACIRRT 1999). However, as Wajcman & Martin (2001) note, the current debate on restructuring acknowledges the degree and broad impact of these changes, but there remains little understanding of the micro-level impact for the formation and meaning of managerial careers. In terms of understanding the gendered dimension within these meanings, the literature has even less to say (Wajcman & Martin 2004).

The concept of an 'identity' which underwrites the lives of workers, and is amenable to analysis, is not new to sociologists (Ezzy 1998; Gherardi 1996;

Giddens 1991). This concept has recently been applied to bring insight to the meaning of radical labour market change for managers. It is argued that this narrative has altered in the face of transformation of the career choices that must be negotiated over the course of a working life. In particular, researchers have used the notion of the 'narrative identity' to explain the level of influence that greater societal change, globalisation, and broader labour market change have on the choices and preferences that managers exert locally (Whitehead 1998; Herriot 1992).

As the next chapter will show, the manager commentaries analysed for this thesis reveal sets of strategies that these managers use to counteract and manage the risks they perceive to be associated with prevailing labour market conditions and challenges. These strategies are formed from impressions that employees make about their own capabilities, their identities at work, and their perceived value as 'commodities' within the labour market. These perceptions are critical to, and underlie employee perceptions of their marketability. This thesis contends that these perceptions steer the types of content that employees are likely to seek directly in their enterprise agreements.

## **6.2 Non-standard work and its arrangements**

The assertion that profoundly different forms of working arrangements have emerged in the last twenty years has certainly dominated labour market research. In statistical terms, there has been a distinct growth in (what have come to be called) 'non-standard' forms of employment. Several researchers have noted the growth in temporary and casual forms of work in Australia (ACIRRT 1999). Australian Bureau of Statistics (ABS) statistics show that approximately one in four workers in Australia is now employed as a casual. Researchers such as Campbell (2000) have been influential in highlighting the significance of this change. Campbell (2000) notes that casualisation has spread into a range of non-traditional sectors and occupations, and notes that many of the 'new' jobs created as a result of the deregulated labour market have been casual and temporary.

Researchers also note a shift in the 'directness' of the relationship between the employer and the employee. In the US and Australia, the trend to 'outsource' has been an important component in the restructuring processes of many organisations (Hall, Bretherton and Buchanan 1999). The growth in non-standard forms of employment has been observed in the growth of both dependent and independent contract labour, and that this has grown in the last fifteen years (ACIRRT 1999b). In the case of dependent contractors, the worker is performing work for an intermediary or outsourced firm. In the case of independent contractors, the notion of employee entitlement is mute because the worker has no legal or taxation status as such. Independent contractors under Australia law are effectively self-employed and are required to have an Australian Business Number (ABN). Both of these arrangements indicate a severing of the traditionally 'direct' link between employer and employee.

Some researchers, Wooden and Vandenheuvel (1996), note that the contractual terms of the employment arrangement (either permanent or casual) does not by definition mean that the tenure of a job will be short, nor that the job itself is more 'tenuous' (unstable), or defined by an irregular pattern of hours or shifts. This however, is a highly contentious point among researchers. While many casual jobs do indeed have extended tenure, and have 'stable' shift arrangements, ACIRRT (1999) argues that this exposes a more insidious motive on the part of employers. In other words, employers are electing to engage workers under more tenuous forms of engagement for reasons other than numerical flexibility. By engaging workers on a casual, or contract basis, employers effectively avoid the obligations associated with permanent forms of engagement including the provision of sick and annual leave, provision of a career path and development opportunities, obligation to adhere to effective and fair performance monitoring and feedback procedures, and redundancy entitlements upon employee departure.



There is an extensive body of literature that shows the long term career, built through a long term relationship with an employer, is in decline. It is argued that labour markets among the developed world are now characterized by a high degree of 'fluidity' or mobility (Neumark 2000). The perception of a 'job for life' is considered to be a concept with less currency in the modern labour market, particularly among managers (Osterman 1996). Workers now face a labour market in which job change is much more common, even amongst those considered to have 'permanent' tenure. The most recent statistics available from the ABS Labour Mobility survey (February 2004) show that almost a quarter of the 9.4 million people working, had been in their current job for less than a year. Of the people who were 'job mobile' (almost 1.5 million workers at the time), 83 per cent had not taken on new roles within a firm, or received a promotion within the borders of a firm, but had changed their employer entirely. ABS statistics show that this level of job mobility in the labour market has remained steady for roughly ten years.

Changes to the patterns of working arrangements also indicate a growth in more 'atypical' and non-standard working hours models. The 'typical' working arrangement is no longer defined by a thirty-eight or even forty hour week. ACIRRT (1999) and Whitehouse (2001) note how the depth of this change has affected established working time norms in Australia. Watson, Buchanan, Campbell and Briggs (2003) have characterized the Australian labour market as facing hours polarization, by demonstrating the strong growth among workers with excessive hours, and among the underworked (those who seek to aggregate a full time job from a number of unconnected and irregular part time jobs).

In addition to the changes associated with hours, the basic entitlements surrounding work have undergone a deep form of deregulation. The arrangements that have historically been a foundation of a typical permanent job have been disassembled. Probert, Whiting and Ewer (2000a) note a decline in the access to paid overtime. Buchanan, Considine and Bretherton (2001) note a

decline in the access to sick leave, promulgated largely through a growth in agreement provisions for incentive bonuses for not taking sick leave. Employer willingness to fund and provide training in order to establish and maintain a progressive career path has also diminished (Hall, Bretherton and Buchanan 1999). Depending on the researcher, some argue this change is driven largely by labour market and demographic change (employee demand) (Wooden 2000), others contend it is largely driven by employer prerogative (Watson, Buchanan and Briggs 2003). While there is debate over the drivers of this change, the breadth and depth of these changes is considered significant by most researchers. Researchers also share a general consensus that a 'typical' working life is becoming increasingly difficult to characterize.

### **6.3 New forms of work character and identity**

It is argued that the majority of workers walk a career path that is intrinsically different, in many respects, to the path that characterized working life twenty years ago. A type of 'new managerialism' has been described and noted by a wide range of researchers as having permeated the experience of work for managers and professionals, but also for a wider range of occupations. A number of terms have been used to describe this phenomena. Whitehead (1999b) notes this as a cultural shift to 'entrepreneurialism'. The emergence of the 'protean' career has also become a term used to describe these changes (Perrin Moore 2000; Hall and Moss 1998). The term 'protean' appeared in the literature as early as the 1970s, applied by researchers such as Hall (1976). The term 'protean' stems from the ancient greek god 'Protea'. Protea, the god of the sea could change form and shape at will, and in specific response to approaching threats.

In this context of instability and uncertainty, researchers note the increasing difficulty that employees face in understanding what provides a 'reasonable' claim in the context of employment contracts and negotiation of entitlement. Sims (1994) notes that historically, expectations have been formulated in the context of an ongoing, long term and stable relationship with an employer. When

this long term stability and 'job for life' notion is no longer considered relevant (by either employer or employee) it becomes increasingly difficult to ascertain what either party believes they 'owe' to the other (Kissler 1994; Sims 1994).

#### **6.3.1 Careers are no longer defined by a single organization**

New forms of career development are argued to be associated with the decline of the large scale bureaucratic operating model for organisations. It is argued that the bureaucracy of organisations once operated on authority, order and 'securing' employees who would be loyal to the organization in a long term employment relationship (Neumark 2000). Wajcman & Martin (2004) describe it as a 'sea change' in which the more bureaucratic organisations are opting for more flexible forms of both employment and are emphasizing a greater level of employee responsibility for career planning. While researchers do not necessarily argue that authority has become less important (Acker 1998), they do argue, however, that authority structures have become less well defined and more ambiguous (Giddens 1994; Wajcman & Martin 2004). Osterman (1996) notes that the 'norm' for a long term and steady employment relationship has changed. Upon entering a contract of employment, many employees now expect that two to three years is a 'long stay' at a single place of employment (Hall Buchanan Bretherton).

As some have described it, the 'organising principles' defining the career have changed (Wajcman & Martin 2001). The career path in the modern labour market is no longer linear (Pascall, Parker and Evetts 2000), meaning careers no longer unfold step by sequential and ascending step. Nor is the career path set out within the walls of a single firm or organization (Kerfoot and Knights 1993). Arthur and Rousseau (1996) talk of the B-L-C, or the 'boundaryless' career. They also note the way that the concept of a 'career' brings meaning to work for professional and managerial occupations, and this must now be developed from multiple employment settings.



### 6.3.2 More responsive and self-directing career development

Careers, it is argued, must now be formed in an environment in which job security is much less common (McGovern, Hope Hailey and Stiles 1998). The sense of attachment between an employer and employee has changed, and most career paths are not 'pre-determined' (Burton 1996). Employers overall are less committed to the provision of a career path (Hall, Bretherton and Buchanan 2000). Researchers have noted that this change has created an environment in which the overall 'meaning' of work has become less clear and less well defined (Bourdieu 1999), but also more open to the interpretation brought by individual workers. It is argued that the 'lived' experience of work is now characterized by fewer boundaries. These changes, it is argued, mean that workers must be more responsive and more self-directing if they wish to achieve substantial career progress (Albert, Ashforth and Dutton 2000).

In the modern labour market context, the personal 'qualities' or inherent characteristics and psychological profile of the manager take on special significance. Those managers and professionals willing to be responsive to challenges or 'risk takers' are seen to be at an advantage. Managers perceived to be 'flexible' in their expectations of the conditions and arrangements surrounding work are argued to be particularly attractive to employers (Wajcman and Martin 2002). The growth in the use of psychological profiling and psychometric testing has been well documented, interpreted by some researchers as indicative of employer desire for a more flexible and adaptable 'breed' of employee. This trend is observable in the banking sector as all of the major Australian banks now incorporate some form of psychometric testing instrument to their recruitment processes for new employees, particularly when employing new graduates. The increasing emphasis on 'cultural fit' and the need to match workplace culture with employee personality are all part of this trend (ACIRRT 2005). There is, however, a wide degree of opinion on what the actual impact of this change has been, and who are the likely beneficiaries. Some researchers note that correct 'attitude' alone is insufficient, and view the so-called rewards associated with

flexibility and 'attitude' driven recruitment processes with a measure of cynicism (Spillane and Martin 2004). Collinson & Collinson (1997) argue that performance measures and newer forms of employee evaluation simply represent a new form of authoritarianism, which may be different in form to the older bureaucratic models but are no less restrictive or controlling. Others argue that the so-called beneficiaries of a labour market geared towards flexibility, are largely those employees who are highly sought after for their specialized areas of skill. ACIRRT (1999), Beck (1992) and Alvesson (2000) talk about the positive rewards reaped by a fairly narrow band of workers, described as 'gold collar' workers.

#### **6.4 Introducing the concept of the 'narrative' identity**

There are a number of theories that suggest that these wider labour market changes impact on the character and identity that underwrite the lives of workers. This proposition is captured in the theoretical construct of the 'identity' or 'career' narrative. Not only do researchers contend that this narrative is definable and measurable (Czarniawska 1998), they also argue that the choices and preferences expressed by workers are formed by this underlying sense of identity or 'narrative'. A range of researchers propose that these 'narratives' have become a particularly instructive tool because they bring both a local and societal dimension to worker behaviour, preference and choice. In other words, to unlock the narrative is to unlock the motivation for choice, and thereby lift the curtain to reveal those features of worker preference that are 'behind the scenes' and otherwise hidden from the view of the researcher.

Narrative identities tell us about the reasons for both action and choice. As early as the 1940s, sociologist Merton suggested the presence of 'bureaucratic personalities' among workers. These 'personalities' were used by Merton as an explanatory device, demonstrating how a worker's sense of attachment and responsibility to work shaped their sense of willingness to undertake tasks for the greater good of the organization and/or for reasons of self interest.

A recent body of work identifies the relevance of the narrative identity directly to Australian manager experience Wajcman & Martin (2004; 2002; 2001).

Wajcman & Martin (2004; 2002; 2001), Sennett (1998), Beck (1992) and Giddens (1991) have all applied a theoretical concept of a 'narrative' in order to decipher how workers understand their current labour market circumstances and make choices about future conditions of work and future job change. For this reason, this thesis argues that this scholarship on narrative identity is not only highly pertinent to understanding the formation of preferences, but places the concept squarely within the debate on enterprise agreements.

The sense of identity felt and understood by individual managers is critical to understanding how these managers make sense of organizational practices, symbols and goals and how they traverse organizational life. Albert, Ashforth & Dutton (2000) parallel the importance of understanding identity with that of the 'rudder' which is used to 'navigate difficult waters'. Other researchers use the notion of a narrative to understand and explain the purpose of action at the level of individual agency, both in terms of personal meanings but also organizational meanings. Senge (1990) talks of 'purpose stories'. These stories are the narrative framework through which managers talk about the reasons for their choices, and explain these actions in the context of the needs of both the organization, but also their 'personal visions'. As Senge notes, in times of organizational restructuring, change and/or crisis, the sense of self and identity held by each employee becomes critical to explanations for behaviour, beliefs and goals. These narratives or 'purpose stories' are critical to understanding the sense of empowerment that each individual brings to the crisis (Senge 1990: 335).

A key concept underlying the formation of narratives is the notion that individual workers "*reflect on what has passed*" (Sennett 1998) or 'reflectively' assess (Giddens 1991) to make judgements about career, working arrangements and conditions (Wajcman & Martin 2001) and future work choices (Wajcman &



Martin 2004). In terms of analysis of agreement preferences, this is a highly useful tool in understanding how managers (or workers) make sense of employer behaviour, the best possible employee response to this behaviour, and the role that the agreement should play in bringing preferences to reality. As Wajcman & Martin (2004) argue, the identity narrative creates the 'space' for managers to reflect on the actions of firms (including both their local employing firm, but also firm behaviour more widely in the market) and the risks it poses to them in career terms, before they nominate their preferences.

Within these theories, the personal meaning that workers give to the notion of 'career' is critical, and impressions of wider labour market change are influential in the formation of these meanings. In the formation of identity narratives, both local factors (workplace environment, household environment) and societal factors (perception of marketability, and the meaning of trust) are emphasized as important. In other words, worker perceptions are formed not just from one single source (for example, current workplace conditions or context). Career narratives are important because they inform the choices made by workers, and how workers perceive the constraints in operation to affect their choices. It is argued that the need to understand the underlying 'narrative' can unlock the decisions made by workers, whether these decisions are 'free' or constrained choices (Wajcman & Martin 2001), and how future behaviour of employees might be predicted (Sennett 1998: 30).

While there is a general level of agreement that distinctly 'managerialist' forms of work have emerged in recent years, there is debate over the impact of this phenomenon for narrative identity formation. Overall, the direction of research can be described as focusing on 'manufacturing' identities, rather than identifying the substance and characteristics of the identities themselves. How underlying identity and narrative can shape worker behaviour has been an ongoing concern of research (Knights & Willmott 1985), or as Deetz (1995) describes it understanding 'the insides' of the worker. Researchers such as Albert, Ashforth

& Dutton (2000) go so far as to say that there are few 'identity givens', and this in part can be explained by more frequent change over the course of workers' life. Again however, these researchers place greatest emphasis on uncovering the construction or 'dynamics' of identity (Albert et al 2000: 620). Some argue that a range of different processes now influence the formation of narratives, and that global factors (including societal setting and symbols) rather than locally supplied information (workplace setting), play a much greater part in the development of career identity than has been the case traditionally (Beck 2000, du Gay 1996, Giddens 1994). It is argued that, more than ever before, globalisation has played an important role in emphasizing the global setting in the minds of workers in producing identity (Giddens 1991). Alternatively, other researchers continue to emphasise that the changes at the local level are still the most influential in production of identity, and it is the destruction of these local forces that have caused disintegration of the narrative (Sennett 1998).

## **6.5 The narrative as an analytical device**

Research in the exploration of narrative identities has some limitations. As just noted, much of the research has emphasized the 'production' and 'process' elements of identity creation. In other words, the 'how' questions associated with career narrative construction. Even these claims however, for the most part, remain untested. Researchers have also identified 'who' or 'what' (in other words the key protagonists) important in the construction of identity. Beck (1992) and Giddens (1991) both focus on the way that institutional circumstances and individual actions and reflections combine to establish a sense of identity. Giddens, for example, describes a 'reflexively organized narrative' – a term used to describe the sense of self-identity generated by workers. Giddens (1991) argues that the sense of self is continually being constructed and reconstructed, with the individual drawing on a wide range of sources (work, home, life experience, childhood, and the unconscious). Franzosi (1998) discusses the process of how culturally supplied materials are interpreted by individual workers, and that the narrative is the explanation or reason for the change or



transformation in work circumstance. Wajcman & Martin (2004) talk of the 'interplay' between local and societal factors in the formation of identity. Discussion of career narratives also notes their usefulness in explaining behaviour and motivation, and to enhance understanding of the labour market choices made by workers (Bourdieu 2000).

There are many questions relating to the outcomes or the impacts associated with career narratives that have not been addressed by current research. While the debate on career narratives has established their place and legitimacy as an explanatory device for worker behaviour, choice and preference, there is still work to do with regard to the development of *definitive* categories of the career narrative. As Wajcman & Martin (2004) state, much remains to be 'empirically tested' with regard to career narratives. Also, there is a blurring between characteristics ascribed to the organization and those ascribed to the individual. Nevertheless, these basic characteristics do provide a guideline, because research suggests that narrative characteristics are 'predictive', in other words, workers exhibiting particular narrative characteristics are likely to behave in certain ways.

This thesis will consider three broad categories of career narrative – the 'bureaucratic' narrative, the 'portfolio' or 'market' narrative and the 'corroded' narrative – to consider whether any or all of these narratives are present among the bank managers at the CBA at the time of interview. The final section of this chapter will sketch out the characteristics generally thought to be associated with each of these narrative groupings.

This thesis will apply the concept of the 'career narrative' as an analytical device useful in the context of analysis of the manager preferences in their enterprise agreement forming the heart of this study. The construct of the narrative provides insight to understanding how both workplace and societal norms can be internalized to affect the behaviour of managers. In the body of work conducted by Wajcman & Martin over the last five years (2004; 2002), the notion of career



narrative has been useful in the analysis of managers' verbatim accounts of working arrangements, career aspirations, and preferences pertaining directly to work practices and policies. Similarly, the preferences expressed by managers during the course of the focus group interviews also reveal insights to the career narratives guiding the behaviour of managers. The managers at the heart of this study were acutely aware of the career implications of particular choices. Identifying the underlying narrative may help to enhance understanding of enterprise agreement preferences, and whether these preferences are derived from gender difference, narrative difference, or indeed cut across a range of worker characteristics.

#### **6.6 The bureaucratic, linear or organisational narrative**

Researchers argue that the organizational or bureaucratic narrative has, in historical terms, been the most significant narrative defining the experience of managerial, and to some extent professional work. This type of narrative is perceived to be definitive for the previous generation of workers, as some basic elements of this narrative were observed in the construct of the 'organisation man' more than forty years ago (Whyte 1956). Similarly, Wajcman & Martin (2002), but also du Gay (1996) and Heckscher (1995) note the dominance of the 'bureaucratic narrative' historically in identity formation for professionals and managers. For the sake of convenience, this thesis borrows the term 'bureaucratic narrative' from these researchers and uses it hence forth as a general descriptor for narratives of this kind.

Researchers suggest that the existence of bureaucratic narratives can be proven through the establishment of three basic criteria, which are all considered pivotal characteristics in its formation. The first criteria is the presence of a large bureaucratic structure which focuses on hierarchy and order (Sennett 1998), and places cultural emphasis on conformity among its staff. Within this narrative, workplace culture is highly important because it is through this culture (or the processes, practices and norms of the organisation) that set boundaries for

members to behave in certain ways (Hatch & Schultz 2000; Dutton & Dukerich 1991). Hatch & Schultz put this most succinctly in saying "...*understanding is always dependent upon its context*" (2002: 995). The second component indicating the presence of this narrative is the maintenance of a long term, relatively stable relationship with an employer (Wajcman and Martin 2001). The third distinguishing characteristic associated with a bureaucratic narrative is a strong sense of organizational loyalty and commitment held by the employee, and maintained through belief in career and promotional rewards in the long term. Sennett (1998) argues that the long term, stable relationship with an employer has historically formed the foundation of this career narrative as workers have a strong incentive to remain with an organization and gradually progress. In fact, within this narrative, the notion of 'career' is inextricably linked to an organization. Sennett also applies the term 'linear narrative' to describe this process. In this narrative, organizational experience and norms are highly important to the formation of the narrative and are the primary source of information through which managers develop their sense of identity and career goals.

## **6.7 The portfolio and market narratives**

The portfolio, market and protean career narratives have been grouped as there a number of elements common to the foundation of these identities. All of these narratives are argued to have emerged more recently (late seventies, and early 1980s), but are seen to be an increasingly dominant narrative defining the modern experience of managers. Changes to the labour market associated with new capitalism and new managerialism are said to be important in the emergence of these narratives. It is argued that these narratives emphasise individual responsibility for career, and that the individual worker takes a more active part in the formation and development of a career path. The emergence of the 'portfolio' career narrative has been construed by some to be 'liberating' (Perrin Moore 2000), because it allows professionals and managers to improvise (job change, or transfer) without undermining impressions of career stability (Liff and Ward

2001). It is said that this liberation occurs when employees recognize the need to take responsibility for their own work and career development (Pascall and Cox 1993). While this places the onus on the employee to anticipate, plan and manage the shortfall when this occurs, it has the potential to deliver rewards to a wider range of employees. Beneficiaries include those prepared to undertake the challenges associated with flexibility of working time arrangements, but also those who may have earned skilled through qualification (the formally 'credentialled') but who may have less formal experience (Pascall, Parker and Evetts 2000). Women, in particular, have been named as a group of workers likely to conform to this profile, and therefore be possible beneficiaries (Drucker 2001). It is also generally believed that the portfolio career narrative is far more common among younger workers. However, neither of these claims has ever been empirically tested.

Although these narratives are often discussed as distinctly different, Wajcman and Martin (2004) suggest there is strong evidence the portfolio and protean concepts share some important basic characteristics. There are a number of similarities between these two narrative forms, and these forms derive heavily from work associated with Giddens' (1991) work on reflexive modernization. Giddens notes that the authority of norms associated with many larger institutions (including the corporation and family) have become less influential in the action and formation of narrative. Individuals are now much more interested in how to manage risk, and how to weigh alternative strategies in managing risk (Beck 2000; 1992). It is argued the wider environment is also more present in the action and choices of workers, and local identity has become less important to the grounding of identity or narrative. These narratives will be discussed and considered jointly and termed 'market narratives' consistent with the terminology employed by Wajcman and Martin (2004; 2002). A defining characteristic of the market narrative is that the worker generally exhibits low levels of organizational loyalty. As Hall (1976) notes, it is the person, not the organization that is in charge of the career. It is argued that the portfolio worker is aware of the need to maintain flexibility and be



open to new job opportunities, therefore they cannot personally place great career investment in one firm. A second characteristic associated with this group of narratives is that 'marketability' represents an important part of conscious action. As Wajcman and Martin (2002) argue, the production of self as a commodity is a driver for behaviour. As Hall (1976) notes, in seminal work associated with the protean career, the degree of mobility is generally higher among proteans. A third characteristic associated with a portfolio and market narrative is 'responsiveness' to opportunities. The portfolio worker must remain responsive to, and willing to take, positions that may lie outside the comfort zone or direct line of promotion (Hall and Moss 1998). This may include lateral transfers or positions with other firms that offer a broader range of experiences (Atkinson 2002; Heriot, Pemberton and Hawtin 1996). Finally, a main contrasting characteristic between the protean career and market narratives, and the traditional bureaucratic narratives, deals with how these psychological criteria impact on 'objective criteria'. For example, for portfolio workers, the sense of self, the sense of meaning brought to work and the need to grow and change are considered most important to psychological success are argued to be the objective outcomes sought. For traditional bureaucratic career narratives, the sense of self is derived largely from the organization and organizational culture. Therefore, for these narrative identities, a sense of position, advancement, salary and status are the objective outcomes that are most valued (Hall 1976).

It should be noted that some researchers take exception to the grouping of the 'protean career' and the 'portfolio career' model. Gratton, Zaleska and de Menezes (2002) argue that these two categories are conceptually different. The portfolio career, for example, is argued to be the objective representation of the new career model, while the protean career is argued to be the subjective experience or 'narrative' adopted by the individual.

Wajcman & Martin (2004) suggest that the incidence of what they describe to be the 'pure' portfolio model, has been overestimated. In their research on manager

narrative identities, Wajcman & Martin (2004) found among so called portfolio narrative workers, a high level of organizational commitment and anticipation of a long term employment relationship with a single employer. This suggests that the categories may have more overlap than previous research might imply.

The 'market narrative' has been posited specifically by Wajcman and Martin (2004) in response to flaws they perceive to be associated with the lack of definitional clarity and 'over-generalisations' they perceive to be associated with the portfolio narrative. Whether the market narrative does represent a distinctly different narrative to that presented by the portfolio narrative is not entirely clear. For example, Wajcman and Martin (2004) stress the heightened degree of 'self awareness', and that choices are predicated on assumptions of maintaining a competitive presence and profile in the labour market. This means that workers visualize projections of their market image, to opportunities that lie outside the firm border, in formation of narratives. This orientation of self to employment, is the orientation to a whole market. Nevertheless, Wajcman and Martin's typology does bring greater definitional insight to the characteristics of portfolio narrative identities, as the experience of workers holding this narrative is currently understood.

While further research is still required in order to give conceptual clarity to these three descriptive categories (portfolio, market and protean), this thesis argues that there are still some characteristics common to all three of these models. For this reason, while the models may be blurred, they still represent a sense of identity that emphasizes personal dominion over career, the notion of self (rather than organization) is considered central to action and choice, and objective outcomes relate to psychological success and professional commitment.

## **6.8 The corroded narrative**

A final set of theories suggests the ability of workers to decide and choose meaningful alternatives about their current and future work choices are seriously

undermined by the modern 'managerialist' experience of the labour market. Within this school, long term relationships with employers, and the acts of routine associated with work are pivotal to building worker capacity to both develop and maintain life skills and narrative responses to negotiate the career life course. One of the most well known proponents of this theory, Sennett (1998), emphasizes that both local and societal factors have been historically important in the creation of 'micronarratives' for workers. Sennett (1998) demonstrates this through use of ethnographic life history accounts of both blue collar and white collar professions in which both long term relationships with a single employer, and the routines associated with work are identity affirming. Sennett (1998) uses the term 'linear narrative' to describe this process. While this does not discount that the repetitive elements of work routines can also undermine the sense of pride, or level of interest in work, the social context in which these tasks are performed can have a building and fortifying effect on the sense of narrative held by a worker (Sennett 1998: 44). This is demonstrated in the case of Enrico, an Italian-American worker who, although engaged in a highly repetitive and low skilled job throughout the 1960s and 1970s, has developed a strong sense of narrative and achievement during the course of his working life. Sennett contrasts Enrico's experience with that of his son, who, although highly qualified and highly employable has been unable to sustain a strong sense of moral identity attached to work.

In the context of the modern labour market, the 'corrosion' theorists contend that the conditions under which workers can generate and maintain a sense of sustainable identity simply do not exist. Although the issue of gender is not directly raised or addressed by this school, Sennett (1998) presents evidence from individual case histories that suggests that the corrosive impact of labour market change will be similarly felt by men and women. A key concept associated with narrative formation is that workers reflect on what has occurred (as seen in the bureaucratic and market narratives), these 'corrosion' theorists contend that reflections on a "flexible and fragmented life" cannot lead to a coherent narrative



(Sennett 1998: 135). Hence, the use of the term 'corrosion' of character, which has been used by both Sennett (1998) but also ACIRRT (1999b). Australian researchers have also noted a sense of 'fragmentation'. Buchanan (2001) talks of a 'fragmented' future when discussing the experience of casual and contract based workers. In qualitative life histories recorded during the course of a national study on training and career development, Hall, Bretherton and Buchanan (2000) note the difficulties associated with aggregating a coherent occupational path from workers occupying several casual job simultaneously. In Buchanan & Bretherton (1998) careers are not shown to be incremental, nor stable, and the responsibility of employee responsibility for career is demonstrated through the high levels of combined full time work and part time study. The employer driven agenda for 'flexibility (reflected in the increasingly stringent behavioural expectations placed on employees, and the decline in the notions of loyalty and commitment in employment relationships) have all but undermined the ability of workers to maintain a cohesive sense of narrative or 'meaning' for their lives. This is demonstrated through case study evidence provided by researchers such as Neuman (1998), who noted the sense of identity confusion experienced by executive workers who were no longer valued for their long term commitment to the employer. As Sennett notes "*institutions shape an individual's efforts to change his or her life*" (1998: 84). The modern labour market, it is argued, is 'disorienting' (Sennett 1998) and individuals are required to react quickly and 'flexibly' but without any assurance that their efforts will be rewarded or valued by the employer in the long term. At the core of the narrative concept is the ability of workers to be able to anticipate and manage future choices with regard to their employment. As Sennett notes "*the dilemma of how to organize a life narrative is partly clarified by probing, how, in today's capitalism, people cope with the future*" (1998: 117)

## 6.9 Conclusion

This chapter has identified three generic narrative identity categories, present within scholarship on career development and formation. The bureaucratic career

narrative emphasizes the value of organizational commitment and loyalty to the firm, and the objective outcomes most valued by this narrative pertain to status and position. The portfolio/market/protean identity narratives seek new career opportunities that extend beyond the border of a single organization. A sense of professional satisfaction and psychological success are the outcomes valued by these narrative identities. Finally, some theorists propose that recent restructuring and changes to the labour market will lead to identity corrosion. In other words, the lack of security and sense of certainty created by conformity to organizational norms will leave workers with a sense of 'career' disorientation, and workers will be unable to develop a sustainable sense of narrative identity. Now that the basic elements or characteristics of each of the narrative forms have been identified, the following chapter will assess whether any, or all of the narratives are present among the bank managers at the heart of this study. These narratives will then be assessed to see if they do offer an explanation for enterprise agreement preference formation.

## **Chapter seven A case of which manager, which narrative?**

### **7.1 Introduction**

This chapter identifies narrative identities held by women and men managers at the Commonwealth Bank of Australia (CBA). The following chapter (eight) will then apply the framework of the narrative to see if it provides an explanation for choice and preference allocation, as it is experienced by individual women and men managers during the course of enterprise bargaining. The biographical information provided, accounts of career plans and goals and the descriptions of workplace experience all give insight to the underlying narrative. As Senge (1990) describes it, the analysis of 'purpose stories'. Understanding these narratives gives greater appreciation of these bank managers both as a group, and as individuals, and the responses they have formulated to cope with the impacts of restructuring (described in chapters four and five). During the course of the focus groups, these managers do describe their career 'stories', and in fact position their preferences in the context of the expectations formed through these career experiences. This thesis uses the typology of narrative identities (outlined in the previous chapter) to identify which, if any, of these narratives appear to be instrumental in the choices of CBA women and men managers.

### **7.2 Locating and identifying the career narrative**

Wajcman and Martin (2001) identify that managers, even within one organisation rarely subscribe to a common, unified sense of narrative identity. Generational, cultural and gender differences each may exert some influence on the creation and evolution of particular narrative identities. The narratives present among the bank managers of this study, reflect a workplace which has undergone a deep degree of change. In some cases, the scars left by this restructuring process become apparent only through narrative identity analysis. The restructuring and downsizing process has altered employee expectations of the CBA as the employer should provide under the terms of the enterprise agreement.



Chapter five identified that the older and newer guards of management within the bank, women and men alike, shared strong consensus on the key problems facing the workforce. This chapter will show that different narrative identities pose different solutions in how best to resolve these problems. These solutions are expressed in amendments proposed to the enterprise agreement. Both long standing managers and newer managers are present in these discussion groups, sharing a common sense of displeasure with the degree of challenge facing the workforce, but with different preference solutions posed to redress these areas of crisis.

Within a labour market environment of restructuring and change, understanding the career narrative offers an opportunity to understand how workers make sense of, and respond to change. The bank, as an organization, is important to formation of identity in all three narrative identity theories (Czarniawaska 1998). For the bureaucratic narrative, the bank provides the dock to which career goals and aspirations are anchored. For market narratives, the bank is important as narratives are consciously formed independent of this bureaucratic structure. For the corrosion theorists, the destruction of organizational stability means the narrative is left 'all at sea'. These interviews occurred at a critical point in the bank's cultural 'timeline'. Albert, Ashforth & Dutton argue that

*"as conventional organizational forms are dismantled, so too are many of the institutionalized repositories of organizational history and method, and the institutionalized means by which organisations perpetuate themselves. Increasingly, an organization must reside in the heads and hearts of its members"* (2000: 13).

The qualitative evidence provided by managers themselves show that they believed the bank was attempting to carve or mould a new institutional culture. Retail branches have been disassembled, many managerial functions have been centralized, middle management positions have been removed and the

organization de-layered. Analysis of the narrative identity of the worker reveals that these identities formulate different responses to these challenges.

### **7.3 Characteristics of the manager participants**

The previous chapter notes three major career narrative identities – bureaucratic, portfolio or market and corroded narratives - each having distinct characteristics. While this thesis accepts the definitional criticisms levelled by some (Wacjman and Martin 2002), nevertheless a career narrative typology can be gleaned from analysis of the body of literature. In particular, level of market experience, frequency of job change, gender and age have all been identified by theorists to be defining characteristics for the three major career narratives. From the biographical details provided by manager participants at the time of interview, it is possible to group these managers into these sub-categories. Ascertaining the general level of experience of managers, and frequency of job change, has been done through analysis of the transcripts and through some additional biographical information about each manager, provided at the conclusion of the interview process. These smaller populations of managers can then be scrutinised to see whether they exhibit key elements of the narrative that research suggests they are most likely to conform to.

The managers participating in these focus group interviews represent a mix of gender, age, managerial experience, and wider employment experience. Table 15 provides a cross section of these basic characteristics, with the exception of age (as this information was not recorded at the time of interview). It should be noted that this sample of managers does not claim to be a representative sample, rather, table 15 shows that there are indeed a cross section of characteristics represented. In this table, using the narrative characteristics as they are currently understood, four possible hotspots have been identified where evidence of particular narratives might be located within these sub-populations. Across the 223 participants, some managers appeared very new to the responsibilities associated with being a

manager, having had less than five years experience in managerial roles. At the other end of the extreme, some managers were highly experienced and nearing retirement with more than thirty years experience in retail banking.

Degrees of what might be described as 'market exposure' are also present within this group of managers. Table 15 notes the years of service exclusively devoted to the CBA. Across the sample of participants, the majority of the participants (men and women included) had more than ten years experience as a manager with the CBA. The cut off point of fifteen years, as the distinguishing mark between generational change in the bank, may appear somewhat arbitrary. However, this mark has been chosen because of workplace-level intelligence on the structure of the career path within banking. Reinecke (1988) in a study of Australian retail banking, argues that bank careers are typified by the ten to fifteen year apprenticeship model. Workers would usually acquire generalised skills and experience for up to fifteen years, before being streamed for management. After this, officers were ranked as 'classified officers' which equated to an accountancy role within the branch structure and the major stepping stone to the ranks of manager (Reinecke 1988: 105).

Among the bank managers, an apparent shift in the level of 'market exposure' does appear to have occurred. In particular, many of the younger managers had experienced more direct 'market exposure' by having held jobs elsewhere before taking up a position with the CBA. This pattern is apparent among men as well as women managers. At the CBA, it appears that the longer the managerial career, the less likely the manager had maintained a position anywhere other than the CBA. In the case of male managers with more than fifteen years with the CBA, none of these managers had ever held a job anywhere else. With the exception of one woman, this is true among women managers also. Among the less experienced managers however, the reverse is true. The majority of men and women managers who had been with the CBA for less than ten years had held banking positions at other banks prior to joining the CBA.



**Table 15      Participants by sex and years of CBA service**

	<b>Women</b>			<b>Men</b>		
	Up to 10 years of service	11-15 years	>15 years with CBA	Up to 10 years of service	11- 15 years	>15 years with CBA
External employment experience	51 <i>Possible portfolio/market narrative?</i>	7	1	14 <i>Possible portfolio/market narrative?</i>	4	
Internal experience only	9	37	33 <i>Possible bureaucratic narrative?</i>	3	36	30 <i>Possible bureaucratic narrative?</i>
<b>Total</b>	<b>60</b>	<b>42</b>	<b>34</b>	<b>17</b>	<b>40</b>	<b>30</b>

\*For example this does not include incidental work or casual work that might have been undertaken while a participant was studying or finishing a higher school certificate or higher degree.

#### 7.4      **Searching for the bureaucratic career narrative**

As noted by the previous chapter, the bureaucratic narrative is defined by three central characteristics – organizational loyalty and commitment among employees exchanged in return for gradual, but eventual career rewards; an organizational form that is bureaucratic and hierarchical; and an employment relationship that is characterized by stability and length.

Among the focus group participants, a key group of managers consistently exhibited a bureaucratic narrative in their reflections on working arrangements and career. Most importantly, this narrative appeared highly influential in the formation and nomination of preferences in the content of the enterprise agreement. The bureaucratic narrative appeared to be steering the way in which, as Wajcman & Martin (2004 & 2002) describe it, managers choose to 'manage labour market risk'. In their research, Wajcman & Martin predicted that managers with these characteristics ('single organization' career with a large bureaucratic organization) would be the most cynical or pessimistic about their future career prospects.

The organisational structure of the bank has, historically, at least been characterised by a number of researchers as highly bureaucratic. Two significant theses undertaken specifically on CBA labour history and organisational structure argue that the size, operating practices and procedures have historically been more akin to a public service bureaucracy. Both Ashe (1997) and Hill (1982) both liken the bureaucratic routines, and the emphasis on seniority within the bank to those centralised and hierarchical elements of structure commonly found in the public service bureaucracy.

These labour history accounts also suggest that not only has the structure been bureaucratic, but this bureaucracy has been promulgated by a masculinist workplace culture. There are a wide number of accounts in Australia, and overseas that describe retail bank culture as 'masculinist', which means the structures, access to promotion, decision making structures are male and serve the interests of men better than women (HREOC 1997, Kitay et al 1995).

There is also evidence that the culture is one that has encouraged incremental rewards and promotion for men, in return for loyalty and commitment to the employer (Probert, Whiting and Ewer 2000; Reinecke 1988).

As might be expected, the bureaucratic narrative appeared most strongly amongst older, highly experienced male managers who had invested their entire career with the CBA alone. The following quote illustrates the importance of these three basic elements - length of service, employee commitment to the institution of the bank, and order and conformity - to this worker's identity as a manager. This quote also demonstrates how the relative stability of this relationship with the bank creates specific expectations about career ascension, based on this long association with the bank.

*"It was never like this years ago. Being a manager really meant something, you were the face of 'the bank'. You were the bank. Serving and working for the customers were values that really meant something. You earned your position, and you knew everything about the bank. It made for a better manager, because you knew the reason for the processes in place. It did not just happen overnight".* (Male retail branch manager 25 years with CBA: focus group 2).

These sentiments were expressed repeatedly by this generation of male, well-established managers (those who had been with the bank for more than fifteen years). Many of the features considered by researchers to be hallmarks of the bureaucratic narrative are present across these comments. Sennett (1998) notes this career narrative as typified by a 'construction' analogy. A career is built slowly and firmly by laying brick after brick, and at times tediously, as managers ascend the career ladder within a firm. The sense of deference this manager feels towards this system is also communicated in the following quote.

*"It took a long time for me to make my way up through the ranks, and to build my place in the organization. When I started out, the bank insisted on a lot of training before you could have customer contact. I remember shadowing a teller for weeks before I was allowed to even look a customer in the eye."* (Male branch manager, 18 years with CBA: focus group 10).



Wacjman & Martin (2002) note a strong sense of commitment to the organization, that appears to supersede the commitment to profession or job, as being a founding characteristic of the bureaucratic narrative. This older generation of male workers within the bank consistently demonstrated this trait. This following comment is certainly representative of this sentiment:

*"...You are the bank. People in the community used to know you as the bank"*  
(Male branch manager, 20 years with the CBA: focus group 17)

The sense of commitment and loyalty to the organization, considered by researchers as distinctive to the bureaucratic narrative, in the case of these bank managers also extended jointly as a commitment and loyalty to the union.

*"I remember my first day, my boss gave me all my personnel forms to fill out, and the union membership forms were right there with all the material. My branch manager gave them to me! I have been a member of the CBA and the union, all my working life"* (Male manager, 25 years with the bank: focus group 15).

Wajcman & Martin (2001) also note a strong awareness of and faith in hierarchy as being particularly distinctive to bureaucratic narratives. The notion of 'seniority' and a 'chain of command' have also been values emphasised in other studies pertaining to highly bureaucratic organizations. Studies in the UK found these values among managers in large scale organizations, including banks (Grimshaw, Beynon, Rubery & Ward 2002). In this narrative, workers see conformity to the order of the organization, and preservation of these time-honoured routines, as delivering certain career rewards down the line. This following excerpt from a male manager (with the bank for eighteen years) illustrates many elements of the bureaucratic narrative. Firstly, it shows the value that this manager places on the older, well established system in which the bank continues to support career development throughout a working life by ongoing provision of training. This manager also perceives no inconsistency between what is good for the bank, and what is good for the individual manager – their

needs are synonymous. Finally, the strong emphasis on the career as only seen in the context of the institutional setting of the bank, is evident within this comment. There is no recognition that career opportunities lie elsewhere outside the bank, and the failure on the part of the bank to provide ongoing career development is 'stunting' to the entire career. For this participant, a loss for bank is a loss for career.

*"People are basically stunted by the current system. There are no opportunities to know or develop skills in anything beyond your current position, and that is bad personally and I think its bad for the bank as well. It makes for a poorly rounded manager"* (Male manager, 18 years with the bank: focus group 7).

*"Where you are taken on, is where you stay, is where you die"* (Male loans manager 15 years with the bank: focus group 13).

Across the 223 men and women participants, these types of comments were evident only among managers who had been with the bank for fifteen years or more, and exclusively to male managers alone. The well-established women managers did exhibit elements of the bureaucratic narrative, however, they did not conform entirely to the characteristics suggested by current research.

#### **7.4.1 Finding a gendered bureaucratic narrative**

This thesis argues that the bureaucratic narrative present within the CBA reflects the highly 'gendered' cultural environment from which it emerged. The bureaucratic career narrative evident among the men was not the same as the bureaucratic career narrative evident among the women managers at the bank. This is a highly important distinction for the purposes of this thesis because it suggests that workers who are apparently immersed in a common workplace environment and culture, and are in comparable positions within the hierarchy, may be affected differently by this environment. As Capelli (1999) notes, different cultural groups can have different expectations of the employer, and different perceptions of employer obligations. This thesis argues that both culture

and narrative identity moderate the terms and negotiation of the enterprise agreement.

Researchers have noted that workers within a common workplace environment can have widely different expectations of what defines employer obligations. The notion of the 'psychological contract' has become increasingly popular in research because it seeks to explain why different expectations and understandings can be held by workers who appear to otherwise share a range of common characteristics, and are engaged on similar employment terms. Although the term is now experiencing widespread use, researchers note that it is still poorly understood, conceptually underdeveloped and requires significant work (Guest 1998; Sparrow 1996). Firstly, the notion has not generally been applied to describe differences between the views of men and women. It is also not clear what contributes to the formation of different psychological contracts, and whether workers form expectations based on formal guidelines and contracts (for example enterprise agreements) or whether custom and practice are more influential in the formation of psychological contracts. Organ & Paine (2000) for example, argue that contingency (or temporary) workers enter into inherently different forms of psychological contract with their employer (2000). It is also acknowledged that restructuring can affect the psychological contract (Sims 1994). There have also been claims that a breach in the psychological contract, by the employer, can have significant implications for productivity and performance. Paul, Niehoff & Turnley (2000) found in their qualitative analysis of psychological contracts, that if employees perceive breaches in the psychological contract with the employer, they may be more likely to engage in acts of industrial sabotage.

There is strong evidence that while the older generation of men and women managers both broadly conform to a bureaucratic narrative, there is also a gendered form associated with their experience of this narrative in the cultural context of the CBA. Firstly, the level of anger among the male managers who



had been with the bank for a long time is palpable. The following excerpts show that these male managers are clearly angry with the bank, for failing to deliver on an expectation or commitment in terms of career ('a psychological contract'). It is interesting that these male managers almost reprimand themselves, as if they have made a poor investment decision.

*"My career has stalled. Things have turned out very differently to what I originally thought they would have...it's like we have been built up to be torn down"* (Male manager 30 years with the bank: focus group 14).

In other cases, the sense of disappointment and a belief that the bank has behaved dishonourably is clear.

*"I feel there has been a deception on the part of the bank...Pride comes into it as well. You don't want to admit you can't cope"* (Male manager 16 years with bank: focus group 12).

Other male managers with a bureaucratic narrative argue that the bank's recent restructuring had created a situation in which managers had been forced to 'cheat'. In other words, the bank had failed to honour its part of the bargain in terms of career, so managers were not under any obligation to conform to the new set of standards set out by performance appraisal and targets. This is consistent with findings of other studies on restructuring, in which managers were found to react strongly and adversely to what they perceived to be violations of the psychological contract (Thompson and Bunderson 2003; Morrison and Robinson 1997). In Atkinson's study (2002), this psychological contract was seen to have a strongly gendered dimension, with men managers who had benefited from long term career development, ultimately feeling the sense of betrayal by the employer more than women.

*"...now the bank is saying 'well, you've been making the targets all along and so we'll put it up'. But they don't realize that we've been fudging the figures all along"* (Male manager 19 years with bank: focus group 2).

*"Since the old days you have got to think smarter and work faster and harder than in earlier periods, but there is a genuine lack of staff. Staff in the bank today have to be a lot better than they used to be. Now you need to prioritise things because you can't get all the jobs done. I have never been up to date in recent times and I have taken the attitude that you can only do what you can do"* (Male branch manager 35 years with the bank: focus group 3).

The anger from the male managers, who have clearly committed themselves to a life long career with the bank is evident. The failure of the bank to deliver on its promise of a career was seen as a betrayal. The sense of fraternity between male managers within the CBA is also considered highly important to the individual experience of being a manager.

*"When I joined CBA it was a career path. Now if you don't perform, the bank takes the attitude that it can replace you"* (Man manager 20 years with bank: focus group 2).

*"If we make a mistake we are demoted immediately. This affects all levels of managers from assistant manager up".* (Man manager 18 years with bank: focus group 1).

*"Salary levels for managers have decreased but what managers do now is more than they did before when they were getting paid more money!"* (Man manager 25 years with bank: focus group 4).

These male managers also expressed anger over the 'menial tasks' they were now required to perform because of the understaffing problem. Many of these managers felt that attaining a managerial position meant earning the right to delegate these tasks. The very visibility of the understaffing problem also undermined the sense of importance attached to their role as manager. The presence of a large team of junior staff had, historically, been affirming to these managers.

*"I'm expected to do more menial work than I would have been expected to do ten years ago. Managers generally are expected to do more of the menial work. The credit analysts fill out forms, but you don't analyse much. It is mind numbing work"* (Male manager 15 years with the bank: focus group 5)



*"You need someone at work to do all the crap work at the branch, and by that I mean someone who will do all the back of house work and they don't have targets to meet. This would leave all the other staff to spend their time on doing target work"* (Male manager 17 years with bank: focus group 1).

*"We are told we have to answer phones, that is everyone's responsibility. How am I meant to find the time to do that? And how does that fit in with my role – to manage? I guarantee when you see an area manager visiting a retail branch they will walk right past a ringing phone"* (Male manager 17 years with CBA: focus group 10).

Among women managers who had been with the bank for a long period of time, their perceptions with regard to the tasks that defined managerial roles were far more fluid. For these women, the unsustainability of understaffing was apparent, but measures of 'task appropriateness' were not applied in their estimation of whether the bank's behaviour was judged reasonable.

*"I see it as my job to help out. It is part and parcel of your responsibility as a manager. You are answerable, and people look to you for direction"* (Female manager 16 years with the bank: focus group 12).

*"It is all hands on deck, there is no doubt about it"* (Female manager 20 years with the bank: focus group 8).

*"I would hate to think what would happen if I didn't pitch in. We would have absolutely no possible hope of meeting targets for the branch. The results for the entire team would be devastating"* (Female manager 22 years with bank: focus group 12).

*"The unfairness is that we just don't have enough time to do what we need to do, and that all staff are under pressure. If I have to pick up a ringing phone here or there, well that's by the by. It is part of our job to make sure that targets are met and that the branch can operate, and that all staff are doing their jobs as well as they can".* (Female manager 15 years with CBA: focus group 10)

For male managers with the bank for more than 15 years, the act of putting in years of service with the bank meant that they had earned this sense of authority, status and power, and that restructuring had torn away part of the pride associated



with being a branch manager. This 'loss of face' in the wider community was expressed by these managers.

*"Managers now, are not how managers were. We are glorified administrative workers, in fact, I don't even think we are glorified actually"* (Male manager 20 years with bank: focus group 8)

*"I don't like saying that I am a branch manager now. I used to feel proud, but now I don't even like telling people I work for a bank"* (Male manager 25 years with the bank: focus group 14).

*"What the bank has done to some of the less well off customers, pensioners for example is very poor. It now has a pretty low standing in the community...The customer comes back to you because you're on the front line and you cop 'egg on your face"* (Male manager 28 years with bank: focus group 17).

This loss of face was also evident in the perception that the retail branch managers were no longer considered part of the central management structure of the bank, and were not treated as part of the inner sanctum of the 'management team' within the bank.

*"Since 1993, the Berlin wall has just gone up between us and them. Us being anyone from an AMC and down, and then the rest"* (Male manager 15 years with bank: focus group 10).

For women managers who represented a similar 'era' of manager (with the bank for a minimum of 15 years), a very different set of career values and expectations were attached to their bank work. Although these managers had also formed a long term commitment to the bank, had clearly achieved a level of career success by ascending the bank hierarchy, they did not conform to the classic mould of the bureaucratic career narrative.

## **7.5 Proposing a new narrative category - the 'diplomatic' career narrative**

This thesis finds a distinctly different career narrative to be present among women who, according to the profile suggested by previous research, would be most likely to conform to the bureaucratic career narrative. These women had all been

with the bank for an extended period (more than fifteen years) and were clearly committed to their career (both professional integrity and advancement were emphasised by them as important). While these features are clearly associated with a bureaucratic career narrative, there are other features and objectives exhibited by these women that do not conform to the bureaucratic career identity. These women managers did not affirm an institutional loyalty to the bank as an entity nor did they voice expectations that the bank should provide an established career pathway for its workers. While the 'form' of their working life may conform to the bureaucratic career narrative, the 'content' of their narrative did not. For this reason, this thesis suggest these women represent a uniquely different narrative, and uses the label 'diplomatic' career narrative' to describe this combination of characteristics and subjective meanings that these women workers bring to their experiences at work.

Women managers who had a long period of attachment to the bank exhibited a type of attachment to the bureaucracy that appeared to be qualitatively different to the attachment exhibited by men managers. These diplomatic narrative identities valued the bureaucratic elements of the organisation because of the assurance and confidence they provided. The practices and routines associated with the older bureaucracy reinforced the feeling among these women managers that they were performing a high quality of service. These women were committed to the bureaucracy to the extent that they were committed to this sense of routine and order.

*"Customers are paying fees who expect high quality of service. The bank is looking to cut costs...Everything used to be checked three times. Now its not even checked. Customers are complaining"* (Woman manager 17 years with bank: focus group 17).

However, this narrative also demonstrates a high degree of diplomacy among women managers who had been able to carve out a career, under circumstances that wider research suggests has historically been hostile to women's

advancement. The type of institutional 'allegiance' that was evident among the men managers, was not present among these women. In other words, while elements of service, integrity and the ethos of being a bank manager is embraced in a professional sense by these women, this is not played out in allegiance to the bank.

The sense of professional integrity and the commitment to being 'a manager for the bank' was clearly important and valued by these women. In the following comments, these women managers were clearly angry about the impact that the sales culture and the greater emphasis on targets conflicted with the customer service ethos they felt should be attached to bank work.

*"There is no doubt that the level of service provided by the bank has been compromised...I think the entire standard of what defines a 'high quality' of service has shifted"* (Woman manager 15 years with bank: focus group 1).

*"Relationship managing is about developing a relationship with customers, but this relationship cannot and does not come when you have targets to meet through sales"* (Woman relationship manager 19 years with bank: focus group 2).

*"The bank knows it will work because of the personal relationship that you have with your clients – they count on the personal sense of responsibility you have to them"* (Woman credit manager business banking 15 years with bank: focus group 15).

*"If you are not making new business, then it is like you are not working at all"* (Woman manager (Lending division) 15 years with bank: focus group 3).

This well-established guard of women managers did affirm the value of the linear nature of the career. In particular, the sense that career ascension should occur through progressive 'steps', and the need to 'earn' a position, were values affirmed through this narrative. However, the perception of what constitutes a linear path for these women, did appear to have some intrinsic differences to the definition brought to bear by their male contemporaries. These women also exhibited a commitment to the order, routine and processes associated with the



larger bureaucracy, but without the deep level of commitment to the 'bank' as an entity. In the following example, this woman manager clearly valued the training that had been provided by the bank, because of the grounding it gave in understanding the wider process and operations of bank work. However, in her own career development, which she discusses at a later point in the interviews, this woman manager acknowledges that in her own experience with bank training, training opportunities had not been as available or accessible as she might have liked.

*"We get people on board now that do not understand the basic of tasks...there are no handbooks to be able to show you how to resolve any of the complex stuff. This would not have happened years ago, because people really did have to get all the basics – learning how to balance and calculate...the bank took the responsibility for ensuring you knew how to do it, and you could not move on unless you had actually done it"* (Woman manager 22 years with bank: focus group 6).

*"...the bank would like to make out that there was too much training before, that not all of it was necessary...but I had to wait a long time to get to where I am. I have had times where I have had to wait while others were released for training...In some ways I have had to travel a little off course in order to make sure that I could continue to grow - taking transfers to more remote places – in order to get back to be able to take a job in a good suburban branch..."* (Woman manager 22 years with bank focus group 6).

Alternatively, in the case of one of the longest serving woman managers with the bank, she takes an entirely different view to 'attachment' to the bank as an employer. Among these diplomatic narrative women, a commitment to bureaucracy (sans loyalty) appears to be a common characteristic.

*“...the bank pays you, you work, but at the end of the day you’ve got to work it out for yourself”* (Woman manager 25 years with bank: focus group 8).

The workplace culture historically dominant within the bank may provide an explanation for these different gendered narrative interpretations. The proposition that workplace culture can be gendered, is not new. A number of studies have identified banking culture as being paternalistic to its employees, but with this paternalism structured to benefit male employees over female employees. Evidence from a national survey conducted in the late 1990s (the focus group data for this thesis was also collected in 1998 & 1999), shows a strong perception by women bank workers that that elements of the paternalist work culture remain. While many elements of formal discrimination have been eliminated by the organisation – the ban on married women was lifted and promotion through seniority was disbanded - women within the bank still clearly believed that women and men were not treated equally by the organisation. In a large scale national attitude study of Australian bank workers at the ANZ, CBA and Westpace, conducted by HREOC, women workers reported the persistence of career barriers that were:

*“almost insurmountable because of cultural attitudes imbedded deeply in the organizations...Another considerable barrier was the attitude of older male managers who represented a previous era of paternalistic management and ‘jobs for the boys’ and not the new environment of ‘managing your own career’ and merit based promotion. Both these factors created an organisational climate that was not conducive to women or their career aspirations”* (HREOC 1997: 3).

There is also specific case study-based research, focusing exclusively on the CBA, that highlights the bank does indeed, conform to the profile of a masculinist culture (Ashe 1997; Hill 1982).

Researchers note the importance of culturally supplied information in the development and emergence of a distinct career narrative. Morgan (1986) in his research on managers and workplace culture, for example, argues that the actions of managers need to be understood as a 'rational' response to the organizational environment from which they emerge. Within these responses, are 'patterns of meaning' which are symbolic and representative of the corporate culture as it is understood by managers within an organization (Morgan 1986). For women managers, who represented part of the established order of the bank, their career narrative is formed as a rational response to the organisational environment (including the gendered elements of bank culture, and the bureaucratic elements attached to the managerial career path).

Researchers have documented the highly resourceful coping strategies that women managers can enact in order to ensure they maintain some form of career progression, even within workplace cultural environments that are antagonistic to women's interests. Pascall, Parker and Evetts, in their studies of women managers seeking career development in banking argue that "*most [women] acknowledged their difference from perceived norms*" (2000: 63). There is a wide body of work which shows that women managers and professionals can develop systematic responses to a prevailing male culture, and these responses represent part of the career plan of these women (Pierce 1996; Frug 1992; Rosener 1990; Menkel-Meadow 1989). These career strategies allow women to reap some of the rewards associated with managerial status and position, but within the limitations imposed by existing at the periphery of a dominant male managerial culture. Other researchers note that these strategies reflect a 'compromise' of sorts, in which women will subscribe to the broader cultural framework but will develop responses to this overarching framework that are both unique but do not overtly challenge or de-stabilise the status quo (Atkinson 2002). Wajcman's research (1998) notes that women managers, in order to successfully ascend career ladders within firms, have had to 'act like men'. Early work by sociologist Moss Kanter (1977) notes that professional women can become inducted into, or are co-opted



by the male structures and values of an organization, in order for women to 'fit in'. Freeman (1990) and Williams (1989) also note the need for women to conform, to some degree, in order to ensure that they are not overlooked for promotion and not excluded from the informal networks that provide insider workplace 'intelligence' on the organization and 'ways to get ahead'.

Researchers such as Gherhardi (1996), have described these responses more lyrically by characterising these women as being in a state of 'outsiders on the inside'. This body of research indicates that these responses are not random, but can represent in Whitehead's (2001) words a 'counter-hegemonic' culture. These responses show that these women managers, when faced with a culture that is not favourable, develop a measured acceptance of the dominant culture. This acceptance permits them a degree of individual freedom and career improvisation. This is consistent with research findings in the field of organizational culture. Hatch & Schultz (2002) note that members of an organization do not necessarily accept the cultural images presented by a firm, but evaluate and actively participate in the adoption of the principles espoused by the organization. These researchers note that perceptions of self are important in the formation of identity, and mediate the wider organizational expectations and cultural norms, or in other words identity is formed "*in relation to who they perceive they are*" (Hatch & Schultz 2002: 995). This thesis argues that this tendency is most evident among women, who believed they had the least to gain from returning to the old workplace culture which they perceived to be heavily paternalistic.

Casey's (1995) research shows that women managers can be reluctant to challenge what they perceive to be a dominant male culture because they risk isolating themselves from superiors and more senior level managers who they may ultimately rely on for promotion. Casey (1995) and Whitehead (2001) both note that women can 'collude' in order to advance, because they are also seeking out rewards and are bargaining with an employer for a favourable outcome, so may be reluctant to openly challenge a dominant culture because it will lead to further marginalisation.

The 'pragmatism' or diplomacy evident within the career narratives of these women is illustrated by their views on key workplace problems. These women acknowledged that employer support for training for example, had declined, and that this was detrimental to staff personally, and to the standard of service provided by the bank.

*"Five years ago you got a lot more training...I benefited from it, and I couldn't say it wasn't helpful to me...but even ten years ago there were people that missed out on training"* (Woman manager 17 years with bank: focus group 5)

These women exhibited a belief and confidence in the linear path way, but were also realistic about where the jobs led and the amount of work and pressure associated with roles. Status and leadership within the bank were not seen as the *only* rewards available for these women. 'Status-derived' rewards were viewed with a greater degree of cynicism.

*"Working for the bank is not seen as a great job. The pressure and stress means that people do not want to move up. There are still some career paths, though not as clear cut as before and no one wants to move up to higher levels because we see the pressure that managers are under....I would love to go back to being an assistant manager"* (Woman branch manager: 16 years with the bank: focus group 7).

Problems associated with understaffing were also universally shared by these women, however they also viewed these problems in a wider context and did not necessarily view the older system with rose coloured glasses.

*"To be honest I think we were a bit overstaffed before and we did have some staff that should have gone, but didn't. But the pendulum has swung way too far the other way, and I don't think what is happening now for existing staff is reasonable or fair"* (Female manager 19 years with bank: focus group 12).

This thesis argues that this generation of women managers have brought a level of pragmatism to their career development within the bank. While they had clearly made a career 'investment' in the bank, and expressed a high level of commitment to job, profession and career (like the bureaucratic male narratives), they did not 'invest' the deep degree of loyalty that their male contemporaries had. As long standing managers with the bank, they still argued that the bank had an obligation to improve the processes and fairness of the systems however, the paternalistic 'psychological' career contract that the male managers spoke of, was viewed by these narratives with a measure of cynicism. As one woman manager stated:

*"I think we should be careful not to look back and make out that everything was perfect before, because there were still problems with access for some people..."*  
(Woman manager 15 years with bank: focus group 13)

Or as this woman manager stated, after a period of almost twenty years with the bank, she was clearly reflective and realistic about the career that had unfolded for her and the need to be responsive to the market and carve out other opportunities wherever these might become available.

*"It has taken me a long time to get to this position, but you know what, I think we have been put into a position where we have some very tough choices...we should be prepared to fight...but that also means moving on if in the end that is what it takes..."* (Woman branch manager 22 years with bank: focus group 2).

## **7.6 Searching for portfolio and market career narratives**

Chapter four notes that the cultural and working environment which CBA managers faced twenty years ago, is vastly different to the environment which managers face today. Chapter four also notes that the significant restructuring undertaken within the CBA in the five years preceding the focus group interviews has re-shaped the model of management within the bank. Managers are acutely aware of the competitive pressure they face, both as managers in the labour market, but also in meeting targets and sales expectations of the bank. Many of the flexibility requirements that the CBA now require managers to more strictly



conform, are consistent with the 'new managerialism' described by the literature. The CBA had indeed introduced and modified performance measurement and appraisal (O'Donnell and Shields 2002), used flatter authority structures and operated on a network or 'work cluster' model (Arthur & Rousseau 1996), had concealed these processes behind area office walls (Sullivan 1999) and had disassembled the occupational 'pyramid' within the bank by stripping away middle management positions (Heckscher 1995). As Grimshaw, Beynon, Rubery and Ward (2002) note, the increased use of outsourcers is also part of this trend. In the case of the CBA, the outsourcing of many processing functions (including card production) and information technology (with the establishment of Electronic Data Service) were outsourced just prior to the formation of the 1998 enterprise agreement.

Looking to research for insights on whether the market narrative might manifest differently for men versus women gives a conflicting picture. There has been a suggestion that the emergence of these market-oriented narratives will see a greater alignment between men and women (Perrin Moore 2000). Others, particularly Wajcman and Martin (2002) suggest that these narratives will still exhibit gendered elements. In both cases, researchers note the lack of empirical exploration associated with these narratives, so definitional questions remain.

Overall, managers who had spent less time at the CBA, and were at an earlier point in their managerial career, strongly exhibited characteristics consistent with those broadly described within reflexive modernisation theories (Giddens 1994; Beck 1992). A first point of difference is associated with the level of market awareness, or the position or understanding of 'self', formed relative to the wider managerial labour market that lies beyond the bank. These managers often compared their working arrangements, their status, and their remuneration packages with managers beyond the shore of the bank. Their value, as a commodity within the wider labour market, was central in their estimations of what should define 'fair treatment' by the CBA. This contrasts with the

bureaucratic narrative in which the commentaries provided by the male managers suggest their assessment of fairness and reasonable treatment is gauged by what they feel the bank has promised from the outset. The following excerpts demonstrate that this element of the market narrative was evident among both men and women managers who had been with the bank for less than fifteen years.

*"...The targets are based on the number of accounts opened, rather than the amount invested. Ten new accounts at one dollar equals ten ticks. One new account at \$10 000 equals one tick...this is not a good bottom line measure to use and I know for a fact it is not the measure used by some of our competitors..."* (Male manager 9 years with bank: focus group 6).

*"I don't know, you know what they say, the grass is always greener, but I think in this case it is..."* (Male manager 8 years with bank: focus group 17).

*"The reward system overall is not good. A manager at RAMs gets \$150 for every referral for a home loan. We don't get any specific and consistent rewards..."* (Woman manager: focus group 5).

*"...pay rises should be linked to the bank's profitability...that is much more in line with good HR practice elsewhere..."* (Man manager: focus group 5).

*"...I have heard stories from the ANZ where the managers are not expected to do half of what we are, and the incentives are geared much more around the effort that you put in"* (Woman manager: 5 years with bank: focus group 4).

#### **7.6.1 Finding a gendered portfolio and career narrative?**

There is evidence, however, that male managers and female managers who broadly identified with this portfolio/market narrative diverged, on a key point. Male managers overall, were far more receptive to and adhered more strongly to the bureaucratic career model of career ascendance being *assured* by the bank.

These male managers, while holding employment experience outside the bank, were also still evidently affected by the reputation or 'legend' of the bank career. This is demonstrated most effectively by a qualitative comment made by a male teller who attended the focus groups, but was not in fact a manager. His

statement of the power of the branch manager as a symbol or beacon of achievement across the bank is clear.

*“...When I started here, I said to myself that after about four years, I would like to be a branch manager because I thought that was achievable (laughter). Once I had been in the bank for six months or so, the reality basically hit me. I realized I would need to wait a bit longer than I had originally hoped. Then after about a year, I thought well it doesn't really happen that way. When I started I thought an [assistant manager] was a possibility. I went to a manager at the time and said look, when I started I thought I could have a career here. He just looked at me and said, look we employ people here to be tellers, and that's that. They are tellers for the rest of their time here – OK?”. (Male teller: focus group 9).*

It appears that these male managers are arguing a case for both the flexibility and range of opportunities afforded by the wider sectoral labour market, but the assurance that the immediate workplace environment will continue to provide opportunities in line with what the bank had provided historically.

These managers, who were newer to the CBA structure, were already stepping into the shoes of the older managers because they had been inculcated into that practice of male managers taking newer managers under the wing.

*“It is hard to train people properly because we're down four of five people. I've got a new guy in the branch, an intelligent guy – he's straight out of uni though. He's really getting a crash course...but I feel it is a responsibility for me as a manager though” (Male manager 13 years with bank: focus group 1).*

Culture, it is argued, can affect a manager's perceptions of themselves and their relationship to the organization. Dutton & Dukerich (1991) argue that organizational identities are represented in the views and values of the organisation's members. As Hatch & Schultz note “*identities are mirrored in the images of stakeholders*” (2002: 991). Among the well established guard of male managers and the new generation of male managers, there appears to be a persisting allegiance to ‘the bank’. This allegiance appears to persist despite a widely held belief that the bank had failed in meeting its obligations to bank staff. The failure to deliver on the terms of the agreement was certainly part of this.



Nevertheless the newer guard of male managers still appeared to be affected by the lure of a long term career promise.

Male managers exclusively framed their grievances with the bank's training regime around the longer term problems this raised for the career path of managers, and the declining status of the branch manager role in the long term.

*"There is supposed to be this career path ahead of you and that, but it's all supposed. Where is the career path really?"* (Man manager 8 years with bank: focus group 12).

*"You've got to get in there, on their side. You have got to kiss arse to get anywhere in the bank. And if you don't, well, you stay where you are"* (Man manager 7 years with bank: focus group 17).

*"The career stream finishes at AMA and AMB levels. After that there is nothing"* (Man manager 10 years with bank: focus group 9).

#### **7.6.2 Proposing a new narrative category – the 'classic' market narrative identity**

Many of the classic elements ascribed to the market narrative were found among women who had been with the bank for shorter period time (less than fifteen years). This group of women managers within the bank do reflect a number of features that have come to be described as the 'knowledge' worker or the modern worker. In broad terms, there was a distinct difference between the views of men and women staff toward career prospects in the restructured Commonwealth bank. The following comment is made by a mobile banker, who has been with the bank less than five years. This comment shows a more 'detached' approach, and it is clear that the manager does not hold the same expectations of the bank delivering on a promise of a long term career. The 'job' is evaluated at a level of abstraction.

*"I think apart from team work, you've got to have support from up high. I am a mobile banker and I am in a totally different area. My time is flexible and I like that, so long as you get your targets and do your work – it's OK"* (Woman mobile banker 4 years with bank: focus group 17).

Certainly, among these women the acquisition of skills that are formal, and have some standing outside the bank is considered an important priority to be met by the agreement. This view of training and formal qualification as a foundation of a basic employment right has also been noted by researchers such as Grimshaw, Beynon, Rubery & Ward (2002) in their work in the UK. As these researchers describe the modern perception of the worker as having *"a view of industrial policy which stresses the importance of skills acquisition as the major criterion for competitive success and for the creation of a flexible and socially mobile society"* (Grimshaw et al 2002: 90).

These 'classic' market narrative women were all located in the cell of managers who had been with the bank for less than fifteen years (see table 15), showed no sense of commitment to the previous system of promotion, and highly valued their ability to 'prove' themselves by what they perceived to be 'objective' (performance-based) means.

*"After five years in the bank I was still only doing proofing work. Since the system has changed I've moved up four grades in four years"* (Woman manager – lending 10 years with bank: focus group 8).

*"I just think in my position it's got some pretty decent career prospects. I was recruited differently, and they have some pretty good training"* (Woman assistant manager – mobile banker 9 years with bank: focus group 10).

*"I was promoted in three months. I went from promotion to GC4 in three months"* (Woman team leader – customer service 6 years with bank: focus group 15).

Both Whitehead (2001) and Legge (1995) argue that women may be better placed to handle the impact of downsizing and redundancy because their own career experience may have been characterized by career breaks, insecurity and non-standard hours. Casey (1995) notes the scope for collusion that can exist between women, particularly when the environment is perceived to be hostile to women's

interests. Casey notes that women too, are employees, who just like men are likely to behave in ways that will further their interests and preserve those elements of entitlement that promise better prospects for development in the career long term. An important observation and distinction found among the women managers is their support for further education initiatives within the bank. Walby (1997), in her research on women managers argued that the strong emphasis on formal qualification and further education would create a polarization in the labour market between the younger generation of women compared to the more established women managers. This following comment from a woman manager notes the importance of self-reliance, and emphasizes the need for bank staff to 'move on' and leave the older conventions with regard to training behind.

*"...the bank does not have a nursery anymore to train staff. They are pushed straight into working without going through that intensive training phase. I was promoted in 11 months because I made the targets set for me"* (Woman manager 12 years with bank: focus group 16).

### **7.6.3 Proposing a new narrative category – the 'institutional' market narrative identity**

Drawing on the qualitative accounts provided by men and women managers, this thesis proposes a variation of the market/portfolio narrative category described by previous literature. This variation, termed the 'institutional-market' narrative is clearly founded on the principles of a market narrative, but also contains a characteristic often considered to be a defining trait of the bureaucratic career narrative - institutional loyalty. In addition, this hybrid narrative category only appeared to be present among men managers, not women managers.



The sense of career commitment and professionalism manifested as an institutional commitment, and a loyalty to the entity 'the bank'.

*"The professionalism is good. You are 'the Bank' to the customers. Customers respect your ideas as though they are coming from the bank. It is a profession"* (Man manager 10 years with bank: focus group 7).

*"To work for a bank it should be a privilege not a chore to do work. We are specialists. Why don't we get treated like specialists? We are an integral part of the bank"* (Man manager: focus group 13).

Among newer managers, this expectation of loyalty to the bank also came attached with some expectations that the bank should provide a longer term career path, reminiscent of a bureaucratic model.

*"I don't see any inconsistency between continuing to provide solid career opportunities, based on experience, but also having performance evaluation playing a part. They are not mutually exclusive principles"* (Male manager 9 years with bank: focus group 12).

Clearly the role of locally supplied information was also part of the perpetuation of this particular narrative. In the case of the following manager, note the acceptance and 'respect' for the playing out of market forces and the need to behave 'flexibly', but how this male manager also sees his role in ensuring that the managerial hegemony of the bank, and 'passing on' the paternalist culture of the bank to newer recruits. This does represent what other researchers might describe as preservation of privilege and advantage within the male fraternity. As early as the 1970s, Moss Kanter (1977) noted that male managers within a male dominated workplace environment can behave in ways that collude, and therefore exclude women.

*I've got a new guy in the branch, an intelligent guy – he's straight out of uni though. He's really getting a crash course. It's like the bank says, it is just not a nine to five job anymore"* (Man manager 12 years with bank: focus group 5)

This thesis argues that these men, who represented the newer guard of management within the CBA reflect a hybrid of characteristics. While their narrative identities have emerged from a 'reflexive' approach to their market position, they maintain some degree of institutional loyalty as important to their notion of career.

### **7.7 Rejecting narrative corrosion**

The evidence presented in chapters four and five, and in this current chapter, shows that understaffing, lack of training and poor performance appraisal systems in particular, have introduced a number of dissatisfying elements to the working experience of managers. This includes the need to scoop up tasks that might otherwise have been performed by a colleague (who may not even be engaged in a similar job), intense pressure and extended hours regimes for workers, and a sense of heightened 'instability'. Sennett (1998) proposed that this type of deconstruction of the long term bureaucratic model would reduce the ability or resources of workers to be able to maintain and create a sense of career identity. It is through these long term relationships, provided under an umbrella of permanent employment tenure, that employees develop a sense of trust and loyalty toward the employer. Therefore, for Sennett, the new forms of capitalism in which long term stable employment relationships are undermined by the employer, compromise the ability of the worker to develop a sense of stable identity. As Sennett states, new capitalism corrodes "trust, loyalty and mutual commitment" (1998: 24) and consequently leads to a 'corrosion' of the worker's character. This thesis argues that the fragmented experience of work was acknowledged by both men and women managers in this study, however, the narrative identities remained resilient and adaptable.

This thesis argues that Sennett's theories in regard to narrative corrosion are flawed for a number of reasons.

The evidence from the CBA suggests that the experience of being a manager has changed, and that a range of managerial role expectations had been destabilized by restructuring. While this disruption to career progression did represent a crisis for managers, it did not completely disrupt the ability of these managers to reflect on this experience and develop a response and solution to manage oncoming risks to career.

The persistence of bank loyalty among younger male managers also challenges Sennett's theories on corrosion. The persistence of the cultural 'legend' of banking life for men, continues among men who are much younger, and newer to this culture. Younger male managers also indicated that they believed joining a bank would bring with it certain longer term career rewards and indicated a commitment to see this expectation through.

Smith (2001) suggests that workers base the construction of their narrative identities largely on intimate and immediate experience. Smith (2001) suggests that unless stories fit, or are consistent with the direct and personal experience of workers, they are unlikely to adopt these stories as part of this narrative. The evidence presented by the 'institutional market' narratives in this thesis contradict Sennett's account. The readiness of the newer generation of male managers to adopt the notions of 'seniority' and 'serving time' shows that what indeed qualifies as 'locally supplied' information may be more complex than Sennett would suggest. Sennett's suggestion that locally supplied stories as the most important source for formation of narrative may require some revision.

The emergence of the institutional market narrative within the CBA suggests that the corrosion of more traditional forms of narrative (bureaucratic narratives) may not occur in the thorough and clear cut way suggested by Sennett. There is also evidence that these narratives exist across the bank, and within the most senior levels of the administration. An example of the institutional market narrative is even found at the highest levels of the CBA, right up to the Chief Executive



Officer (CEO). David Murray has been CEO of the CBA since 1991 and has been described as the architect behind much of the CBA's restructuring and efficiency reforms (Jones 2003)<sup>1</sup>. Murray represents a blending of both the older and newer narrative sub-texts present within the bank. Murray was a long standing branch manager with the CBA (as was his own father), entering the bank as a teller and serving the classic 'apprenticeship' of management. Murray also, however, sought formal qualification through completing a post graduate level degrees in business administration, provided through the bank's tertiary support scheme. Murray's experience demonstrates that a strong blurring can occur between narrative identities. It also demonstrates the ability of managers to reinvent themselves and adapt their identities in the face of what Sennett describes as potential character corrosion.

## **7.8 Conclusion**

This chapter has identified the presence of four distinct narrative identities among the managers at the CBA at the time of interviews. These four narrative identities reflect different sets of career aspirations, and reflections on restructuring which, in turn, shape the expectations regarding the obligations and responsibilities attached to the employer. The qualitative evidence provided by these managers also demonstrate the important and formative role that workplace-based factors (culture, occupational hierarchy, and operational processes) can play in the formation of career expectation.

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<sup>1</sup> It is important to note that, as of June 2005, David Murray resigned his position as CEO of the CBA.

The following chapter will directly apply this four narrative typology to the interpretation of enterprise agreement preferences to see whether these narrative identities provide an explanation for the formation of agreement preferences.

## **Chapter eight   Applying the ‘career narrative’ framework to the analysis of enterprise agreement preferences**

### **8.1   Introduction**

This chapter argues that an understanding of the career narrative must be brought to bear in consideration of enterprise agreement preferences. The two previous chapters have shown that the formation of these career identities emerge, and are maintained, through a range of workplace-based factors. This claim holds true for both women and men, and challenges the assumption inherent to much bargaining research which claims that women’s preferences in enterprise bargaining will be driven primarily by the work/family conundrum.

This chapter is pertinent to the overarching argument of this thesis, because it explores assumptions associated with women’s ‘engagement with the process’ of bargaining, that have defined previous research in this field. It has been argued that women will be less likely to assert their interests and challenge men workers, and less likely to engage in militancy than their male colleagues. Although this thesis does not seek to directly explore gendered aspects of militancy and union activism, the qualitative evidence provided by the focus groups does allow some assessment of whether men or women exhibit dominant or subordinate behaviours in expressing preferences. This chapter will explore the level of awareness among men and women of the entitlements available to them under the enterprise agreement. This chapter will also uncover men’s and women’s expectations of the agreement making process, and consider the willingness of women to challenge or acquiesce to the issues advanced and pursued by men.

This chapter argues that the significant restructuring agenda, introduced by the employer over the period of a decade or more, has produced a ‘generational’ difference in the narrative identities present among workers across the bank. Both bureaucratic career narratives and portfolio career narratives exist simultaneously within the bank managerial team. In addition, two different



forms of career narratives are proposed - the diplomatic narrative and the institutional market narrative. These narratives represent a hybrid of characteristics previously thought to be mutually exclusive. These four narratives appear to have distinct characteristics, and also have a heavily gendered dimension.

This thesis seeks to explore whether career narratives can offer a satisfactory framework to explain the content and direction of enterprise agreement preferences nominated by women and men managers. It does so through closely following the content and process of preference nomination for twelve managers, representing a cross section of career narratives (these six women and six men were drawn from the focus groups analysed for this study). Each of these managers has been chosen for closer analysis because they exhibit archetypal examples of a specific narrative identity. For the purposes of this analysis, the specific narrative identities are those defined and described in the taxonomy provided in chapter seven. These four narrative identities were identified by chapter seven as being the four dominant narratives present among bank managers in the CBA at the time of the data collection.

The preferences of six managers who fall within the broad parameters of the bureaucratic career narrative will be analysed. This includes three male managers who subscribe to the 'purer' form of the bureaucratic career identity, and three women managers who exhibit a variation of this bureaucratic narrative (for the purposes of this thesis, chapter seven dubbed this career narrative as 'diplomatic').

The preferences of six managers who fall within the definition currently provided for the 'market' or portfolio narrative are also represented in this analysis. This includes three women managers who subscribe to the more classic model of the market narrative characterised by the literature, and three male managers who exhibit characteristics of the variation of this form. The previous chapter of this thesis has used the descriptor 'institutional-market' narrative to describe managers with this set of career characteristics.

The preferences expressed by these twelve managers gives insight to whether their underlying narrative emerges as a driver in their preferences, and how these narratives impact on the expectations with regard to the enterprise agreement process. This chapter will track the progress of managers who appear to be driven or guided by very different perceptions of career risk. Chapters four and five note that both men and women managers recognise the same issues to be the key problems in greatest need of resolution. This chapter shows their approaches and solutions to these problems to be very different. The career narratives shape both the expectations for what the agreement can deliver, but also the steps necessary to achieve career progression and the most suitable arrangements for maintaining satisfactory quality of life and career satisfaction.

## **8.2 Enterprise agreement preferences among ‘diplomatic career narratives’ – Joan, Pat and Linda provide solutions to key workplace problems**

The previous chapter identified a set of characteristics associated with a unique career narrative, present exclusively among a key group of women managers of this study. This thesis has coined the term a ‘diplomatic’ career narrative. The preferences of three women managers - Joan, Pat and Linda - all exhibited characteristics consistent with this narrative type and have been selected so the specific preferences they advance might be given closer scrutiny.

Joan has worked for the CBA all of her working life and at the time of interview had been with the CBA for seventeen years. Joan entered the bank on completion of her HSC. Joan is manager of a retail branch in the Western suburbs in Sydney, and is responsible for a team of approximately twelve staff.

Pat is an assistant retail branch manager in a regional branch on the Central Coast of NSW. At any one time, there can be up to fifteen staff employed at the branch. At the time of interview, Pat had been with the bank for fifteen years. Like Joan, Pat entered the bank at entry level (as a teller), and has progressively climbed the managerial ladder. Pat has also taken short periods

away from work (maternity leave). In addition, Pat describes her career route upwards as being 'indirect', as she has made a number of lateral moves into business banking areas (which were positions she transferred to, at level), also to positions in lending, before returning to retail branch management.

Linda is a manager within the field of 'relationship management'. Linda's position represents a new form of work that has emerged post-restructuring. The relationship management teams are typically smaller (up to five staff) and represent the new form of service 'clustering' which is said to be the post-restructuring model for bank work. These teams are responsible for building, maintaining and managing relationships. This includes personal investment portfolios or business customers of significant size. Linda's position is located within a business branch in the inner city of Sydney, and Linda has worked for the CBA alone for the last nineteen years.

### **8.2.1 Understaffing**

The previous chapter provides an inventory of characteristics that typify a diplomatic career narrative. The key elements of this narrative emphasise a commitment to the job and the 'profession' of bank manager, a commitment to the routines and processes associated with the bureaucracy of the bank as a large institution and what might be described as a pragmatic or 'diplomatic' approach to the linear career path that had been provided by the bank historically. While these women argued that they had managed to ascend the career ladder, they also maintained a degree of realism over how personally difficult they had found this experience of career progression. They accepted the system had delivered some benefits, however, they also argued that some change in the system was still necessary in order to ease the difficulties for other staff.

Joan, Pat and Linda all argued that understaffing was the most significant problem facing bank staff at the time of interview. However, the influence of their diplomatic career narratives are seen in the responses they propose to this crisis. Both Joan and Pat argued that the understaffing problem could be resolved by blanket increases in staffing (at junior, intermediate and



supervisory levels). They argued this because they perceived that excess 'volume' of work was a universal problem across retail banking. Note in the following excerpts how their arguments in support for more staff are positioned firmly in the context of making the larger bank bureaucracy work more efficiently. These diplomatic narratives show confidence in the wider processes and routines that had allowed them to perform well as managers for many years. They also perceived that a lack of staff affected the ability of all team members to perform well, and that this was a significant problem given the high performance expectations that bank placed on staff (in the form of targets).

*"The daily expectations of the bank don't allow staff to do all the things they need to do at the Branch level. We need more staff to make sure that the quality of service does not fall...It is meant to be a team environment isn't it? You can't expect that staff will be able to get things right every time, ensuring there are enough staff ensures that cross checking is done, it allows us to account for human error. That protects everyone, the bank, the customers and us..."* (Joan).

*"Two tellers at my branch have been away for a total of six months together and we still have to cover their targets...It is not fair on anyone, and it means that staff cannot be released to attend training that might be the difference between ensuring a shot at promotion or not...It undermines the entire system"* (Pat)

Similarly, Linda concurred that an 'across the board' approach to hiring more staff was necessary in order to resolve the problems associated with staffing. Linda argued that more staff were required at both lower and higher levels within the hierarchy because all staff appeared to be affected by the tight timelines associated with intense targets.

*"If you talk to anyone in the bank, from Armidale to Wagga, we need more staff. The pressure is coming down, from the top, on everyone. No one has been left unaffected by the increased competitive pressures associated with a shift to a sales culture..."* (Linda).

In addition to increasing staff levels, the diplomatic narratives also indicated support for improving the administrative processes associated with back-filling and appointment of staff to fill vacancies as they arose. Speeding up these processes, greater streamlining of these processes and the need for a

'fairer' system overall were all emphasised within these preferences. As the following excerpts demonstrate, the emphasis is in each case, on the need to ensure that the bureaucracy is working efficiently. These women argue for the need to codify these staffing practices formally in the agreement. In addition, these women indicate no reservations about senior management control over the determination of staffing levels, however, they want protections or measures in place to ensure some accountability, transparency and fairness attached to these decision making processes.

*"The formula they apply for staffing branches is wrong...it is arbitrary and wrong. The amount of work we have within our branch is just too much for the number of overall staff assigned..." (Joan).*

*"The bank needs to apply more flexible criteria for the appointment of temp staff. We need to be able to appoint temps quickly and to back fill when staff are at training, or are sick. As it stands, there have been cases where a position has sat vacant for months because of a transfer, and we cannot even get a temp in there...there is a ripple effect of staff around that position as the burden falls to everyone around the empty job...Area office has to be more prompt in their response to this..." (Pat).*

*"Area managers make decisions about targets that don't seem to be grounded in any reality..staff quotas and targets need to be formulated in tandem...from the way things work now that certainly doesn't seem to be the case at the moment" (Linda).*

In addition, these women managers also made a case for the need to ensure that 'backfilling' of vacancies, did not occur at the expense of existing permanent staff. For example, both Linda and Path noted that temporary staff, often used to cover tellering vacancies, did not understand the processes of the bank. This created additional pressure on existing 'permanent' staff who were required to meet targets.

*"The temps do not always know what they are doing, although they claim to...tellers often have to patch up messes created by others [temporary staff] but then have to explain why they have not met their own targets...it is unfair" (Pat).*

*"More needs to be done to ensure there isn't a mismatch of skill...tellerling, despite what some people would have you believe, is a job that requires a lot of skill. Just getting temps to do this, when they have never actually done*

*telling before, even though they may have worked in a bank before, does not work. It creates a problem for everyone in that team... ” (Linda).*

### **8.2.2 Performance appraisal**

The diplomatic career narrative underwriting the lives of Pat, Linda and Joan as managers is seen in their preferences to improve performance appraisal.

These women all noted slightly different problems that had arisen from targets, but all of the issues stemmed from the same concern. Each of these excerpts demonstrates the emphasis or need to improve the systems associated with regulating the targets, and improving the way in which they were applied in the context of performance appraisal.

*“...an employee’s performance is based on targets, but the targets are not weighted or measured properly” (Linda).*

*“In principle, I don’t think there is widespread concern about the presence of targets, but the size of the targets needs to be reduced, both at the aggregate level and at the individual level...we need across the board reductions...No one objects to the notion of performance monitoring. But the way the system is currently operating is not fair to staff, and I don’t believe it is giving them the information they really need anyway. I would have serious doubts about the accuracy of the information they get. It really fails on both counts” (Pat).*

*“Targets are not reduced when staff leave, or when they are sick, or when they are transferred. For the staff at work on that day, the bank expects these targets to be absorbed by the unit. It creates an additional pressure...” (Joan).*

The preferences advanced to change the processes and routines associated with targets, were remarkably similar among these women. In all cases, the diplomatic narratives stressed the need to improve transparency and accountability of area office management decisions (currently the level of management responsible for developing branch ‘aggregate target’ levels).

*“Senior management need to be aware of the impact of these decisions on staff...I know that branch managers are doing all they can to stress their concerns but more needs to be done...” (Joan).*

*“The system is failing staff at the moment. More information and feedback should be provided to all staff about the wider plans of the bank and how this will impact on the productivity and performance expectations” (Linda).*



*“There was much more scope for branch managers to explain the circumstances of why targets were not met. Now, it is so arbitrary and senior levels within the bank need to give greater account of the regional variations, and local conditions that can affect branch ability to achieve particular targets...” (Pat).*

The diplomatic narratives also stressed the need to ensure that more ‘traditional’ notions of customer service were not lost in the collection of performance data. The problem of ‘troubleshooting’ or the ability to draw on wider institutional knowledge in order to solve a more complex customer problem was raised as an important feature of customer service. The following comments from these diplomatic narrative women demonstrate how important they feel this troubleshooting is to good performance. They argue that troubleshooting tasks need to be reflected as part of the performance appraisal criteria in some form.

*“...I have done a lot of troubleshooting...trying to sort out the problem for them [customer]...there is no consideration of the time. You might spend an hour trying to sort out the problem but then you haven’t achieved your sales target because of that...It’s really frustrating because if the customer are not happy, they will take their business away, and the bank does not recognize the retention of business, or see that troubleshooting is part of our job, all we are doing is sales sales” (Linda).*

*“There is no understanding now of why things have evolved in the way they have...processes and routines don’t just develop out of nowhere they come about for a reason. Unless you understand the background behind some of the wider bank systems you don’t have a hope when a moderately complex problems springs from nowhere. Or when the computers break down! [laughter]” (Pat).*

*“Staff are not just as well versed in basic policy and basic process as they used to be...performance management is only capturing information on one element of the customer service task...it doesn’t give a full picture of all the leg work that can happen before you actually open that account...” (Joan).*

### **8.2.3 Training**

Diplomatic career narratives argued for the agreement to include a commitment to increase staff access to training, across the board. Managers with this narrative believed strongly that the bank had an obligation to provide

training for staff both initially (for example induction training) and to create an environment in which staff would be able to access opportunities for training. These managers also indicated that training was important because it allowed staff an opportunity to understand the wider processes and routines, and 'meaning' of bank work. The following excerpts demonstrate that Joan, Linda and Pat all perceive training to be important for staff to understand the wider context of bank work, understand the wider bank as an institution, and to troubleshoot and resolve more complex problems for the customer.

*"...the other day I was trying to find something for my staff. Apart from the videos there isn't any. There is only something for the managers, personal lenders and bankers...there is nothing available, even if we have an opportunity to set aside time to train, the bank is not providing the resources...The way it is now, managers don't have the tools to be part of the infrastructure, part of the system that makes training work. For example, as a branch manager I don't have staff files which say which courses they have been on and which courses they should go on...As a customer service officer or a general classified officer they have to go on certain courses in order to get that step up...but they might only only that course every six months...you really need to be able to plan ahead for release of staff..." (Linda).*

*"The lack of training means that staff just do not have the ability to be able to handle the wide range of issues as thoroughly as they might have in the past. What the bank has done by cutting costs, has the cut level of effectiveness and the level of wisdom that staff can bring to the job..." (Pat).*

*"Staff can't be expected to work in an institutional vacuum, and that's what the bank is expecting staff to do...staff are dumped in a job, they are expected to function at top speed and be highly effective...some institutional knowledge and context is important" (Joan).*

Diplomatic narrative identities also appeared more 'reserved' in their criticism of the reductions to bank-provided and administered training (that occurred in work time, and was provided and paid for by the bank). These diplomatic narrative identities recognize the value of training, yet also recognized the potential benefits delivered by taking a less well worn track and maintaining an ability to improvise. To demonstrate, Pat's testimony is provided as an example. Pat argued the case for staff to develop a more sophisticated understanding of bank processes and routines. However, Pat did not see 'bank-training' as the only way in which to gain this knowledge. Pat saw lateral transfers as both part of a legitimate career strategy (hopping sideways

and upwards) but also part of a wider bureaucratic narrative which valued the importance of understanding, in detail, the nature of the bureaucracy for which she had committed her career.

*“I take a bit of a different view. I’ve had the opportunity to work in some quite different areas, and been exposed to a range of jobs just through using the transfer. I think that has kept me interested, and has allowed me to see the wider parts of the job, and some of the links between jobs and areas” (Pat).*

### **8.3 Enterprise agreement preferences among ‘classic’ market narratives – Kathy, Heather & Louise provide solutions to key workplace problems**

The previous chapter identified a set of characteristics associated with a unique career narrative present exclusively among the ‘newer guard’ of women managers participating in this study. These women managers conformed to what previous literature has described as a classic market narrative. The preferences of these three women managers – Kathy, Heather & Louise - all exhibited characteristics consistent with this narrative type. The following section will apply this framework to the enterprise agreement preferences expressed to see whether it provides a suitable explanatory framework.

Previous research has identified the ‘classic market’ narrative to be distinguished by some key features (chapter six), and the presence of this narrative has been detected among women managers, typically with less than fifteen years with the CBA (chapter seven). The classic market narrative is distinctive from other forms of career narratives in a number of ways. Firstly, researchers argue that the narrative is grounded, or positioned more strongly in worker perceptions of wider economic and labour market change. Typically, workers understand and interpret their career experience and set career goals in the context of ‘market comparators’ and relativities. A second distinguishing characteristic associated with the market narrative is that the individual ‘reflexively’ perceives themselves within this market both as a ‘commodity’ and that they must maintain a position of desirability in the market in order to maintain some career progression. The notion of ‘Me Inc’ is used by researchers such as Wajcman & Martin (2004). A third



distinguishing characteristic is that career development is a process driven by 'self-determination'. Career boundaries are not bordered or defined by a firm, and individuals are seen to take a stronger role in decision making including choices to leave jobs and seek promotion or transfer. For the classic market narratives, it is not necessarily the employer who is ultimately responsible for providing the opportunity to develop the skill and human capital necessary to maintain these transitions.

Kathy, Heather and Louise have all been identified by this research as using a 'classic' market narrative identity to guide their career choices as managers. Kathy is an assistant manager in a retail branch located in the outer suburbs of Sydney. The customer base for the area is mixed, with a range of small owner operator businesses and families. New home owners (professional singles and couples) are also a significant part of the customer base because of the large scale residential building developments undertaken in the area. The branch typically has a staff of approximately fifteen. Kathy has been with the bank, since entry level, for a total of ten years.

Heather represents an entirely new form of worker and labour process within the bank. This process has emerged directly as a result of restructuring changes to occur in the bank in the five years preceding the interviews. Heather is a mobile banker, and provides a range of traditional investment advice services, and interviews for a range of CBA products (from loans through to life insurance) off site. Heather travels to businesses or private homes in order to provide these interviews after hours, or at times best suited to the consumer. The position of mobile banker, while having a long 'span' of working hours (anywhere from 7am to 9pm at night), the position has a number of other entitlements. Workers have the option to work from home, have access to a lap top, mobile phone and car. Heather's position is at assistant manager level, and she has been with the CBA for nine years.

Louise is a retail branch manager and has been with the CBA for twelve years. The retail branch is located in the northern suburbs of the ACT. Louise's home branch represents, in some respects, a 'time capsule' of a typical CBA

branch in a middle class suburb that might have existed twenty years ago. The branch has a high proportion of families and home loan customers, because of the relative affordability of the area. The branch has strong ties with the local community, has been active in promotion and sponsorship of local football teams, and still actively promotes and manages the long standing 'school banking' scheme for local primary schools. Louise has held other jobs in both the public service and a private finance firm, before joining the CBA.

### 8.3.1 Understaffing

Kathy, Louise and Heather also see understaffing to be a key problem that needs to be redressed by the agreement. Kathy, Heather and Louise all agree that the understaffing situation would be remedied by blanket increases in staff. The need to increase transparency in process was also emphasised by these three women.

In the following excerpts, one of the major problems perceived to emerge from understaffing is the impact it has for workload and the volume of work tasks that need to be undertaken by staff. These managers all assess or measure the volume of work within a wider market context – particularly what their knowledge and awareness of standards outside or external to the business tell them is common for managers engaged in similar duties in firms elsewhere. For example, in the following quotes, what is judged 'reasonable' in terms of the agreement's role is done so in the context of what is occurring elsewhere within the banking sector. Typically, for market narrative identities, comparators lie beyond the borders of the firm.

*"I find it ironic that the bank claims to be more competitive and more market-oriented than ever before, yet much of their staffing responses appear to operate in a vacuum, with no real regard for customer demand"* (Kathy)

*"The banks evaluation for time management and staffing levels is a real problem...the assessments are unrealistic and the staffing levels are based on this and so are the quotas...We are always having the need to be 'competitive' reinforced to us, but I just cannot see how this approach could make good economic sense...It is not logical for us the bank to set up a system where staff are almost certainly going to fail in performance terms...how is that good for business bottom line?"* (Louise).

*"I tell a friend of mine what goes on here. She works at the NAB and she has her own problems with the way things run there, but she just laughs when she hears about the chaos that some of the poor staffing decisions around here cause" (Heather).*

While the criteria used to measure an 'understaffed' bank may be different to that applied by the diplomatic narrative women, their preferences to resolve understaffing remain remarkably similar.

### **8.3.2 Performance appraisal**

Again, the notion of 'what the market expects' and 'what is reasonable market behaviour' shapes the views of these managers towards the agreement. In the case of Heather and Kathy, their measure for what is 'reasonable' in terms of performance appraisal is external to the firm. In both of these examples, market narrative identities appear to be highly aware of the fact that careers are governed by astute market choices by workers. However, they also perceive the bank to be governed by the same market vagaries. These managers are using what Giddens (1991) describes as 'culturally supplied information', information external to the bank, to assess whether the actions of the bank are reasonable.

*"I studied HR at uni and this is extremely poor HR...to have built a system that is built on excessive targets is a system designed to fail...it will not bring out good performance in people..." (Kathy)*

*"...it is pretty outrageous for the amount of pay we receive. I mean if you are paid a lot, you can accept some trade offs associated with pretty tough performance expectations but you certainly couldn't make that kind of case about bank work" (Heather).*

These market narrative identities also stressed that the time sanctions (created by understaffing) meant that appraisal was not performed properly. For these women managers, they argued that managers should be given adequate time to spend time with staff, meet regularly to discuss performance and give feedback. and that this time should be scheduled into manager's diaries so that time could be appropriately devoted for these important responsibilities.



Heather, Kathy and Louise all wanted this responsibility enshrined, in some form, by the agreement.

*"There is no way I have time to meet with every member of staff to discuss their performance, and at the moment that is what is meant to happen..."* (Louise).

*"If area office say it has to happen, well you give us the time to do it, back off on the targets and allow time for performance management to actually occur"* (Heather).

*"...it is ad hoc, and irregular. I know of cases where staff reviews are not occurring at all, because the manager is just so flat chat..."* (Kathy).

### 8.3.3 Training

Market narrative identities did not give support for boosts to bank-provided training that is geared towards the promotional 'grooming' of staff. Instead, these managers argued that training for immediate areas of skill shortage was necessary.

*"I think it is more practical to address the areas of greatest needs at the present time. For our team, and it sounds like a lot of people are in the same boat from what we've been discussing here, that people need training for their current jobs, for the challenges they face right now on a day to day basis. To try and introduce the idea that people should be training for positions down the road, it is not solving problems that are at crisis point today"* (Kathy).

*"Everyone feels the impact of someone who has not received the right training for a job. Everyone has to help out more and be a bit more alert to the signs that someone is in trouble"* (Louise).

*"I wish I had the time to be able to show the newcomers the ropes, but I am flat out as it is. If managers had a bit of extra time to be able to mentor effectively some of these problems might be avoided...but I think the problem has become so bad now, that a more co-ordinated effort on behalf of the bank is necessary"* (Heather).

These managers also recognised that career progression could occur through means other than the incremental career climb that had characterised bank life in the past. Heather argued that she had been a direct beneficiary of the restructuring processes within the bank:

*"After five years in the bank I was still only doing proofing work. Since the system has changed I've moved up four grades in four years" (Heather).*

Equally, Louise also argued that the expansion to generic CBA training may not necessarily be the best way forward to solve the current problems with training in the bank.

*"...the bank does not have a nursery anymore to train staff. They are pushed straight into working without going through that intensive training phase. I was promoted in 11 months because I made the targets set for me" (Louise).*

Women defined by a classic market narrative, did not disregard the value of some bank-provided training. For example, they criticised the inadequacy of product training and also criticised the bank for not offering the opportunity for staff to learn new products in work time. However, the classic market narratives gave strongest support for the need for the bank to maintain opportunities for transferable skills. In particular, bank support for the attainment of tertiary qualifications was applauded by these women. This is strongly consistent with a market or portfolio narrative in which workers value skill accumulation that can be used beyond the borders of a firm, and affirms their value and marketability to the wider labour market.

In the case of Louise, she argues that strengthening provisions within the enterprise agreement to give staff opportunity to attain tertiary qualifications is essential:

*"I just think in my position it's got some pretty decent career prospects. I was recruited differently, and they have some pretty good training... You can't go anywhere these days without a degree" (Louise).*

This kind of argument is also posed by Heather and Kathy:

*"They say if you want to get a promotion these days, you have to get a tertiary degree" (Heather).*

*"The bank provides good opportunities for further education if you choose to take it. Employees can get subsidies for further education and I have had this benefit to get an accounting qualification. The bank will support staff on further education if they can see it will benefit them and your career" (Kathy).*

These quotes indicate a level of awareness among these women, of the need to preserve or provide 'career' insurance in the event of 'hard times'. This is consistent with other researchers who have found that women have developed a type of responsiveness to career development that is not generally shared by men. Pascall and Cox (1993) describe women managing careers and seeking prospects for further development in a way where the ultimate or 'end goal' may be opaque. The need to develop transportable skills and qualifications that carry legitimacy outside the organisation are essential. It is interesting that women preserve the need to maintain this responsiveness to career development, even within an environment in which the career goals and rungs on the career ladder have, historically at least, been extremely well defined. In a sense, the desire to develop more solid and tangible access to the tools which enhance employability and promotion prospects demonstrate that women managers in the bank are attempting to avoid pitfalls that women have faced in career development historically. As Dunlap (1994) has described it, a career formed in adversity, or a career developed in 'retrospect' rather than in prospect.

#### **8.4 Enterprise agreement preferences among bureaucratic career narratives – John, Fred and Doug provide solutions to key workplace problems**

The previous chapter identified a set of characteristics associated with a career narrative present only among a key group of men managers of this study. The preferences of three men managers, identified as subscribing to the features of a bureaucratic career identity, are explored in this section.

John is a branch manager who has been with the CBA since taking an entry level position as a teller. At the time of interview, John had been with the bank for his entire working life (33 years). John had spent some time, early in his career, working in retail branches in remote parts of NSW. However, once he had 'served this time', John had sought appointments at suburban and city branches in Sydney. At the time of interview, John was manager of a retail branch in the Eastern suburbs, with a staff of approximately eleven. The



affluence of the area, and the high cost of real estate in the area meant that the retail branch had performed well historically in terms of securing and managing home loans. In the five years prior to interview, John stated that he had become increasingly disgruntled with the bank, had been contemplating leaving or retiring from the bank. Approximately two years after the focus group interviews, John was offered a redundancy by the bank, and accepted. He has been unable to find employment at a comparable level elsewhere within the banking sector.

Fred is a branch manager in north western Sydney, managing a staff of approximately eighteen. Fred had been with the bank for twenty-five years at the time of interview, and had worked for the CBA for his entire working life. Due to changes in the bank structure, and downsizing, the branch at which Fred had been manager for some eight years, had been recently threatened with closure. Fred was considering positions in other areas of the bank, including business banking, but was awaiting decision from the bank with regard to his current position before deciding.

Doug had been with the CBA for twenty years and has held a number of jobs throughout the bank. He currently manages a suburban branch in Sydney. The branch was large (approximately twenty staff), as a number of branches in the region had been consolidated in recent years. At the time of interview, Doug was temporarily engaged in the position, having sought the transfer, at level, from a branch further away from the CBD in which he had a permanent position. Just after the interviews took place, Doug applied for the job but was unsuccessful and returned to his permanent position to a branch in the outer suburbs.

#### **8.4.1 Understaffing**

John, Doug and Fred all acknowledge that lack of staff is a 'cornerstone' problem, which affects all staff by increasing the overall volume of work that each staff member is expected to perform. However, John Doug and Fred remain adamant that a more highly focused set of recommendations be made for the agreement, and these preferences reflect a staunch bureaucratic career

narrative. As chapter four has detailed, a large number of staff have been cut from retail branches Australia wide. For managers with a strong bureaucratic narrative, this loss of staff represents an important symbolic loss of empire or dominion within the bank. While chapter four also notes that the band of management within the bank, numerically had grown, these managers perceived this to be a threat, and that it had undermined the badge of manager. As these comments by John and Doug demonstrate this perception:

*“One customer said to me the other day, there are too many “chiefs” and not enough “indians” at the Bank...I couldn’t agree more” (John).*

*“...there was a roll out...they culled too many people...they have lost all the good people out of the middle and now they throw new people in the deep end” (Doug).*

*“We need more staff in the branches before managers can manage and just walk around watching people’s performance” (Fred).*

For John, Doug and Fred the need for the agreement to specifically nominate increases at junior and support role levels is paramount. These managers argued specifically for staff growth to occur within a narrow band – from teller through to customer service positions (general classification level one through to general classification level three). These managers were adamant that further staff levels added to the management level would in fact, exacerbate the problems currently associated with training and performance appraisal.

#### **8.4.2 Performance appraisal**

The bureaucratic narrative identities demonstrate the deepest level of resentment towards targets. Part of this resentment appears to be fuelled by what the introduction of targets represent symbolically for these managers. These targets, argue John Doug and Fred, place greater onus on managers to continually ‘prove’ their worth to the organisation. This move received strong in-principle opposition from these managers because they felt that earned promotion should already prove their legitimacy and worth to the organisation.

The deep level of cynicism of these managers also confirms conclusions made by other researchers that a disruption or failure to honour a psychological contract with a well established group of employees can create a risk of sabotage, cynicism and low morale among the workforce. These comments reflect this anger:

*"It is like the counter is re-set every time and what has happened before isn't valued by the bank...There is some idiot sitting in an ivory tower somewhere getting paid \$500 000 for it and coming up with these ideas" (John).*

*"If there is someone who has been there a while and their job is on the line, they are going to cheat. Not all the accounts that are opened are genuine" (Doug).*

*"What they expect and what you give are two different things. You have to play their silly games. But they are only games, and you can always cheat" (Fred).*

John, Doug and Fred wanted blanket reductions in all targets, for all staff, and wanted the enterprise agreement to reflect this commitment from the bank.

#### **8.4.3 Training**

In contrast to the training position taken by the classic market narrative identities, the bureaucratic narrative identities criticized the displacement of traditional bank-provided training. While these managers did not openly oppose the provision of subsidies to study for tertiary qualifications, they argued for a return to in-service training.

*"Staff are just not trained for anything beyond their classification level...there is no room for growth or development" (Doug).*

*"Now all procedures are centralized and people are not taught how to look for problems. People just don't have the experience or training to be able to troubleshoot" (Fred).*

*"People do not understand the basics, nor the bigger picture. Staff are so overworked around the newcomers that they can't really take the time to coach them, to show them the ropes. People are definitely thrown in at the deep end" (John).*



In the case of Doug, he viewed these changes to the structure of training with a sense of finality or as 'the end of an era'. Doug argued that these changes would change the nature or 'meaning' of bank work, for the worse.

*"We can't afford to take people on because we can't afford to train them. Where you are taken on - is where you stay, is where you die"* (Doug).

In the case of Fred, he raised concern that the more established tradition of training, and the legacy of more experienced managers passing their experience down to the new recruits would be lost.

*"It is hard to train people properly because we're down four or five people. I've got a new guy in the branch, an intelligent guy - he's straight out of uni though. He's really getting a crash course. It's like the bank says, it is just not a nine to five job anymore"* (Fred).

The notion of 'serving time', undertaking training gradually, and earning a position within the bank was also an important theme reflecting the bureaucratic career narrative among these men.

*"When I first joined the bank, I was in the bank for more than two years before I worked in the teller's box. You understood exactly what all the processes were...nowadays the kids are going in there that don't understand what they are processing and therefore they can't understand why they are making errors"* (Doug).

Among these managers, and only among these managers was there perceived to be a significant problem with what one manager termed 'overpromotion'.

*"I don't think enough training is provided, we rely on the older and experienced staff to do things. There is no training and employees are thrown into management roles and create major operational stuff ups because they don't have the experience, knowledge or training. There is a tendency to more managers beyond their skill level within the bank"* (Doug).

*"...With four years experience they can become an AMB. In 1994 there was no way that [woman] or [man] could have got as far as they have in such a short time period. The promotion system is different now and people move up the ladder quickly, even when they move to the higher levels they do not have the knowledge and experience to support those who are below them"* (John).

*"The bank is pushing people up too quickly in order to fill gaps as older people leave. But these people who are being pushed up don't have the right knowledge... A lot of people from the branches find the only way to really get up from your GC graders to an AM is to get into business banking. Now they are applying for these jobs and the pool of trained people is disappearing. They are getting them and they just sit there and have no idea...we've had one since December and I said to her why don't you go and read the rule book, she was always asking about this one thing. She had no idea about the book, she'd never heard of it or seen it...she's being paid an AMA wage so we can't use her as an assistant, and you haven't got the time to sit there and train her...but everyone else in the branches is still trying to get into these jobs and without the training the back up or anything" (Fred).*

Grimshaw, Beynon, Rubery and Ward (2002: 90) notes that bureaucratic career narratives are guided by a career model of 'modest achievement'. In other words, managers do not anticipate a 'rags to riches' experience by committing in the long term to a single bank. Status has traditionally been given priority over monetary or other forms of rewards. A notion of fairness and 'good pay' remains implicit to these expectations (Grimshaw et al 2002). This is clearly apparent in the career narratives expressed by both Doug and John in their reflections on how the agreement should remedy or reinstate important elements of bank life for managers.

*"...let's face it, we have all stayed here for reasons other than a big pay cheque, we must have..." (Doug).*

*"I really felt that we would have received slightly better treatment than this, given the amount of investment and commitment staff put in around this place..." (John).*

For these men, the agreement plays an important role in restoring or reclaiming what they feel has been lost, and in maintaining the psychological contract that they still felt had value, significance and relevance, in some cases thirty years after they joined the bank.

## **8.5 Enterprise agreement preferences among institutional market narratives**

### **– Robert, Paul and Tim provide solutions to key workplace problems**

At the time of interview, Robert had been with the bank for ten years, and had worked for both Bank of Queensland and Heritage before joining the CBA. Robert's formal position is located in a city branch as a lender and financial

advisor. Because of the branch location, in the 'big end' of town, a high proportion of the customers are commercial or professionals.

Paul, at the time of interview, was engaged by the bank as a personal banker, located with a branch in the inner city district of Sydney. Paul had been with the CBA for eight years, and entered the bank under a graduate recruitment program. Paul's formal training is in accountancy, although he has not been engaged formally as an accountant by the bank.

Tim has had approximately ten years experience with the CBA, although he did hold a position for a short time with a large bank in Melbourne. Tim is a manager of a suburban branch in the Western suburbs of Sydney, and at the time of interview had been in this position for approximately eighteen months. Tim noted during the course of the focus groups of his intention to seek alternative work (either within the bank, or elsewhere) because he was highly dissatisfied with the working arrangements he faced.

#### **8.5.1 Understaffing**

Robert, Paul and Tim all argued that more staff were needed within retail branches in order to alleviate some of the pressure on staff. However, like John, Doug and Fred, they too felt that the agreement should include specific provision to increase the number of junior staff rather than restore staff levels more broadly. While the preference may be same, the rationale or reason they offered for this choice was slightly different to the bureaucratic narrative identities. As the following excerpts show, these three managers indicated that junior staff were necessary because the lack of staff had affected the ability of 'managers to manage'. They argued that the lack of staff meant they were required to pick up more of the administrative slack, and could not exercise quality control as effectively as they had. For these managers, this represented a bad use of time and meant they could not perform the elements of the managerial role they perceived to be pivotal to their role as managers.

*"There is nobody here to do the shit anymore. An example is the abolition of the sales support officer positions. Those duties have just become the job of*



*the sales support area. Then the stuff is pushed on to the relationship manager” (Paul)*

*“The area office used to do all the settlement work...one person now does all the settlements...these people generally do not have lending knowledge and so cannot solve problems when they come up and make mistakes easily...”*

*(Robert)*

*“Bottom line - we need more clerical assistants. It is ridiculous to suggest that managers should be having to grab every phone that is ringing...I had to clear the fax this morning when I came in because there was no one else to do it. Now I don't see how that represents good economy or good resource use – and that's taking the bank's point of view!” (Tim).*

The notion of a managerial role being affirmed through the level of discretion attached to the position, and the need for the agreement to affirm this through its provisions relating to staffing was also clear.

*“We are told that the power to make decisions lay with the branch managers – the power to hire and fire and staffing levels. But then when you get back to the branches you are told that you have not got that power, or in fact that you never had it. The area managers are not going to give their power away”*

*(Robert).*

*“It is ludicrous that we are in a position where we have got to provide documentation to senior management, effectively to backfill a position...at our level we should have that degree of budgetary control” (Tim).*

### **8.5.2 Performance appraisal**

Tim, Robert and Paul all gave strong and effusive support for the need to reduce targets, across the board, and for all staff. They perceived these targets to be immensely unfair, and stressful for staff.

*“...now they [targets] are daily and monthly instead of annually and therefore much more weight is put on them. There is constant daily pressure instead of six monthly targets” (Robert).*

*“I had my PFR targets downloaded to me yesterday, and before I left the office today they had been increased. So I need to personally get 335 000 new dollars to the branch every week”. (Paul).*

*"...it's even so bad that some tellers who make extra sales...will keep those extra sales up their sleeves to make it easier to make the sales for the coming week...I can't blame them, I think it is a survival strategy" (Tim).*

Among these narrative identities, the other major concern associated with performance appraisal emerged from concerns with the administrative burden associated with the monitoring of staff. These tasks, it was argued by the institutional market narrative, undermined their role as managers.

*"Everything is about delegation and how you should be empowered. But it's all about meetings...it wastes time and it doesn't actually achieve anything" (Tim).*

*"A lot of the work associated with monitoring performance is just paper pushing" (Robert).*

*"Now we are responsible for collecting stats, and ringing in three times every day to provide the information...and all of this falls on the branch manager to do it...we don't even know to what real purpose this stuff is being applied...I imagine it is just a big waste of time..." (Paul).*

### **8.5.3 Training**

For institutional market narratives, the need to maintain bank-provided training for positions beyond the current classification level also emerged strongly as a solution to the 'under-training' crisis across the bank. For this narrative identity, the need to re-establish some form of career path that was sanctioned by the organization, and gave 'clear sight' of opportunities that followed on from the current position was an extremely important priority.

*"Higher Duties were once used to cover absences but this no longer occurs, and staff are not trained for anything beyond their current classification level. Some staff might have personal lending skills from previous positions but because they are so over worked in their current position they don't help out. It's go hide in office and panic – basically sink or swim" (Robert)*

*"Lending is not popular, and once you're in lending you don't tend to move. It is the same in personal banking... One of the fallouts of the staffing issue is the lack of promotional opportunities these days" (Paul).*

*"The career stream finishes at the AMA and AMB levels. After that there is nothing" (Tim).*

The conviction to build an institutional career path remained strong among these male managers. This conviction remained despite their assertion that their aspirations lie beyond the shore of a single firm. The findings of this thesis suggest that 'organisational assets' still feature as an important priority among men who subscribe to the market narrative identity model. In the early 1990s in the UK, the findings of large scale studies of professional workers suggested that employees would be shifting to a world in which organisational assets (built within a large corporation) would be without value, or would certainly be heavily depreciated (Savage, Barlow, Dickens & Fielding 1992). Throughout the 1990s, a body of research has emerged which argues that employees would be less compelled to maintain a long term 'relational' contract with an employer. Some researchers describe this process as a form of 'phasing out'. In other words, the maintenance of a long term career ladder (internal to a firm) would become less important for many employees (Albert, Ashforth and Dutton 2000; Arthur & Rousseau 1996). This thesis suggests that the case for this argument is not clear cut. In the last few years, some research has emerged which suggests that the organisational foundation for the career path has not been dismissed. In 2004, Wajcman & Martin's study of men and women managers found strong and renewed organisational loyalty among male managers. Pascall, Parker and Evetts (2000) also found an ongoing organisational loyalty among young male managers in banking, despite extensive restructuring and hostility from the employer. They described it as an almost "obsessive dedication to the employer" (Pascall et al 2000: 70).

## **8.6 Narrative identity and risk management strategies**

Applying the career narrative as an explanatory framework to the analysis of enterprise agreements gives insight to the elements of workplace change perceived to pose the greatest risk to career development, and how individual workers believe these risks might be contained. Aspects of workplace change and practice perceived to be 'risky' appear to shift, depending on the career narrative informing the decision making process of the manager. In the case of the bureaucratic narrative identity, the concept of career has been tied so closely and exclusively to the CBA, that solutions proposed for the key



workplace problems (understaffing, training and performance appraisal) reflect the need of these managers to maintain and preserve the elements of status, leadership, and managerial 'dominion' over junior staff. Simply put, these managers perceive the scope for career sustainability beyond the shores of the CBA to be more limited. Therefore, these bureaucratic career narratives place greatest priority on ensuring that scope for career development continues to be provided by the bank. For women subscribing to the diplomatic narrative identity, the strategies in career risk minimisation represent more of an 'each way' bet. While these women managers have clearly benefited to some extent from the managerial career provided by the bank, they also recognise that the path they have traversed has not been as 'linear' as it might have been. For this reason, these women maintain a strong commitment to retain the assurance provided by good practice, routine and bureaucratic process. At the same time, these diplomatic narratives are less concerned with maintaining the career path in its original form, and recognise some prospect for career development through alternative means. For the market narrative, and the institutional market narrative the need to maintain marketability are all important. This thesis exposes the gendered variation within this market narrative. For women subscribing to the more classic market narrative, the sense of attachment and loyalty to the CBA is low. The need to maintain access to training opportunities that will expand and develop opportunities beyond the walls of the CBA are considered a highly important inclusion for the agreement. The commitment to the profession of manager, and the need to preserve a certain standard of professional conduct is important to these managers, and the preferences pertaining to the issues of understaffing and performance appraisal do reflect the desire of these managers to use the agreement to preserve and maintain this standard of service to both customer and managerial integrity.

Men managers overall (regardless of the career narrative present) expressed the deepest resentment over the perceived failure of the bank to deliver on a commitment to a long term career path, and sought to use the enterprise agreement as an appropriate vehicle to seek compensation from the bank. As writers in the field of the psychological contract argue, the traditional notion

of a career is built on the exchange of employee commitment for eventual career reward (Hall and Moss 1998). Men managers (of both narrative identities), expressed a belief that they had fulfilled their part of this contract, and expected the bank to also honour its part of the bargain. On the other hand, women managers (across both narrative identities) had not entered into this 'paternalistic psychological contract' and did not exhibit the same type of institutional loyalty in their enterprise agreement preferences.

In the case of the women managers in this bank study, their commitment to career, their need to execute their managerial responsibilities in a principled and ethical way, and the level of professionalism they use in reflections on career choices is evident. However, neither the diplomatic narratives, nor the market narrative identities felt this career was attached inescapably to 'the bank'. For those men subscribing to the most classic model of the bureaucratic career narrative, these men reflect a notion of skill development that is linked only to the internal job ladder, which is specifically linked to the 'bank' as an organizational identity. As Roberts (1993) notes, this model is more akin to the job ladders associated with some trades, including steel and metal workers in which workers enter the organization with a low level of skill and experience, but incrementally and slowly climb an internal job ladder from apprentice to master craftsmen.

In some respects, reactions among the diplomatic narratives confirm speculation that women generally cope 'better' with restructuring because they have had to, by necessity, manage and cope with change and turbulence through their professional lives (Wajcman 1998). It is certainly well documented that women are more likely to take career breaks (Garey 1999; HREOC 1997) due to the care of children (Glezer and Wolcott 1999), and have historically been the ones to adapt their working lives and schedules to accommodate the flexibilities necessary to care for children or older relatives. The greater numbers of women engaged in part time work is seen as part of women's ability and willingness to adapt where necessary (Hakim 2000). Although it should be noted this perception of women as 'more adaptable' has been widely criticised for generalising and stereotyping the experience of

women. Austen, Jefferson and Thein (2003) for example argue that this generalisation fails to reflect the diversity in women's experience. Whitehead (2001) also rejects generalisations of this kind for the lack of empirical evidence to support them. The qualitative evidence presented from the experience of diplomatic narrative women and the classic market narrative women suggests that these women do harbour less anger and resentment towards the bank. This thesis argues that both of these groups of women did not hold the same expectations of the employer from the outset (albeit for different reasons).

A different model of career management did appear to guide women of both a diplomatic career narrative and a classic market narrative. In other studies documenting the experience of women managers in long standing employment relationships, Atkinson (2002) notes a similar response among women to a paternalistic culture. Women managers, who feel the full suite of progression options are not available to them, will seek to gradually accrue skills necessary for advancement. Pascall, Parker and Evetts (2000) coin the term 'credit accumulation' to describe the strategies used by women, to acquire skill sets and experience that broaden their opportunities for promotion. These strategies for skill development may not, however, be geared towards a particular position or rung in the career ladder. It is argued that this is distinctly different to the approach taken by men managers (Pascall et al 2000). For men, set career goals are more likely to remain in plain view at all times, and men will generally choose what they believe to be the most direct line between current position and next career opportunity (Pascall et al 2000).

The level of resentment apparent among bureaucratic career identities is echoed in other studies of organizational culture. Wajcman (1998) found deep resentment among men in organisations where restructuring had occurred to pursue a more active anti-discrimination policy. Among men with a long standing position of authority within the hierarchy, these men perceived themselves to be the 'hardest hit' by restructuring changes. In aggregate terms (as the statistical changes noted by chapter four demonstrate) the bank was hiring more women overall, and appointing and promoting more women to



managerial positions across the bank. As Whitehead's (2001) research notes, men managers describe feeling threatened when the numerical presence of women at managerial level increases. The male managers of the CBA clearly saw themselves with the 'most to lose' should the enterprise agreement not gain some ground in terms of clawing back traditional elements of the career model.

Some researchers have argued that managers who have successfully traversed the challenges associated with the modern labour market, are those that have been able to transfer or convert 'organisational assets' into 'cultural assets'. Wajcman & Martin (2001) for example, argue that managers successfully manage this conversion, are those that minimize 'personal risk'. For the CBA managers, the issues considered to be at greatest crisis point were the same (overwork, poor performance evaluation and inability to access training), however the solutions proposed were structured around career risk-minimisation strategies. These hedging strategies or risk management strategies varied depending on the narrative identity of the manager.

### **8.7 Gendered patterns in preferences: a summary**

This section provides a brief summary of the preferences expressed by the four narrative identities considered by this thesis. This summary gives an aerial picture of patterns present in these preferences, and shows how these preferences strongly follow gender lines. In the case of understaffing (see table 16) there is a clear pattern among the twelve managers. Both the bureaucratic narrative and the institutional market narrative value the role that junior staff can play in buttressing the managerial role. In addition, these two groups of managers give strong support for the discretionary control over staffing decisions to be returned to branch managers. In contrast, the diplomatic narrative and the market narrative both argued for greater codification of the processes used to determine staffing levels within the agreement. Making the formulae used to determine resource levels more transparent in the agreement was one solution proposed.

<b>Table 16 Understaffing, preference summary, by narrative identity</b>				
<b>Seeking provision within EA</b>	<b>BN</b>	<b>DN</b>	<b>MN</b>	<b>IMN</b>
	♂	♀	♀	♂
Increase staff levels: occupations not specified		X	X	
Increase staff levels: junior levels specified	X			X
Change formula for staffing levels: branch manager should determine level of FTE	X			X
Change formula for staffing levels: have set quotas that take branch characteristics into account		X	X	
Ensure speedy backfilling of vacant positions: branch managers should have discretion to back fill	X			X
Ensure speedy backfilling of vacant positions: area office should shorten their response time to requests to back fill		X	X	

In the case of performance appraisal problems, a similar pattern emerges in preference nomination. The gendered pattern to these preferences is not quite as strong as the pattern found among understaffing preferences. The distinction between the views of the older versus the younger generation of managers is more apparent on this issue. Nevertheless, a gendered pattern across the narrative identity preferences is evident. Table 17 shows both the diplomatic narrative identities and the bureaucratic narratives gave support for the notion of performance appraisal to take a more 'traditional' view of customer service by including the notion of 'troubleshooting tasks'. Bureaucratic and diplomatic narrative identities concurred that targets needed to be codified in the agreement, thereby affirming the commitment that this early generation of managers continues to have for 'due process' and accountability. However, a number of gender differences are also evident. Both the older and younger male managers expressed concern about the growth in menial work for managers, and sought to change this trend through proposed changes to the agreement. Women managers (both diplomatic and classic market narratives) expressed less concern with the *content* of performance appraisal instruments. Rather, both groups of women perceived unfairness in performance appraisal to be caused by understaffing. As

managers, these women argued that they could not give feedback adequately nor could they ensure that staff who were considered under-performers received appropriate counselling and support by the system.

As documented by other studies (Grimshaw et al 2002), and detailed in chapter four of this thesis, restructuring within the bank has meant that the ‘manager’ has become less important in directly monitoring and evaluating performance outcomes of staff. While men reacted to this strongly, and these views filtered through to their preferences with regard to the agreement, women were less effusive on this specific monitoring issue.

**Table 17      Performance appraisal, preference summary, by narrative identity**

<b>Seeking provision within EA</b>	<b>BN</b> ♂	<b>DN</b> ♀	<b>MN</b> ♀	<b>IMN</b> ♂
Reduce targets for all retail branch staff immediately	X	X	X	X
Formula that area office use to calculate targets should be transparent	X	X		
Targets should be reduced to reflect ‘troubleshooting tasks’	X	X		
Change to appraisal process required: branch managers should be given adequate and fair time to ‘appraise’ staff performance		X	X	
Change to appraisal process required: reduce administrative burden on managers created by data collection	X			X

Table 18 provides a summary of the preferences pertaining to training. Looking at the spread of preferences, table 18 shows a strong pattern that is both gendered, yet also guided by narrative identities. Men (of both narrative groups) wanted the agreement to deliver assurance of a career path within the bank for managers. The women managers (of both narrative groups) showed a deep commitment to their role as managers, and to their jobs, and employees, however, they did appear to embrace the notion of individual responsibility for career more than men. Women subscribing to the market narrative wanted a sympathetic environment for training provided through the policies of the



bank, but also wanted to maintain individual control and choice over how, when and what kind of training was accessed.

**Table 18      Training, preference summary, by narrative identity**

Seeking provision within EA	BN ♂	DN ♀	MN ♀	IMN ♂
Improve level of training in retail branches: provision of CBA training available beyond current level	X			X
Improve level of training in retail branches: provision of CBA training for current job and job tasks		X	X	
Improve level of support for tertiary education through use of greater subsidies for fees and more study leave		X	X	

**8.8      Conclusion**

This chapter shows that men and women managers do seek significantly different types of agreement content. This chapter also notes that these points of difference do not hinge on family-specific preferences. The application of the narrative identity typology brings these patterns in preference nomination to light. Men managers (both long term incumbents and new comers) shared a common preference for key elements of the paternalistic career path, and restoration of cornerstone operating processes (high level of decision making power, and a large team of staff) that had historically been important to preservation of this paternalism. Women managers showed some distinct differences (between the long term incumbents and new comers). Diplomatic narratives emphasised the need to preserve some more traditional and bureaucratic processes of bank work. However, women managers (across both narrative groups) aligned preferences on the issues of training, and gave support for the bank to improve employee access to achieve further degrees and qualifications that would have legitimacy outside the CBA infrastructure.

### 9.1 Introduction

The literature review and methodology of this thesis (chapters two and three) identifies a number of key assumptions underlying the debate on enterprise bargaining and women. The first set of assumptions relate to preference content, and suggest that women will be more likely to advance preferences for provisions and entitlements that can be used specifically for 'family' reasons. As chapter five notes, the analysis of the focus group material found bank managers identified four main issues affecting the overall quality of their working lives, however, none of the key areas nominated for change related specifically to enhancements to 'family-specific' entitlements.

The second assumption associated with women's engagement with the bargaining process is that the behaviour of men will result in marginalisation of women. This behaviour can manifest in two possible ways – direct constraint on women's ability to assert preferences, or marginalisation by omission of women's preferences. Chapters seven and eight identified that women and men did pursue different paths of change for the enterprise agreement, and that these different courses could be explained by applying the framework of narrative career identities. There did also appear to be some collusion between both 'generations' of male managers within the bank. Male managers of the established guard, and male managers of the next generation of managers both actively pursued agreement content that would shore up their status and positions of leadership within the bank hierarchy.

This chapter will test the final assumption identified by this thesis as being common to women and enterprise bargaining research. This assumption contends that men's preferences will be privileged by enterprise agreement content. In order to answer this broad question, this chapter will be guided by four questions. Firstly, does the enterprise agreement address the key priorities, as identified by the men and women bank workers featured in this study? Secondly, does the enterprise agreement incorporate these preferences,

in whole, or in part? Are there any distinctive patterns or features to the way in which these preferences are incorporated into the agreement? Finally, does the agreement appear more inclusive of men's preferences, or women's preferences? The previous chapter (eight) provides a list of preferences advanced by the four narrative identities that exist across the men and women managers in the bank. These preferences relate specifically to the upcoming certified enterprise agreement for these managers (the 2000 Commonwealth Bank certified enterprise agreement). This final preference inventory will now be used to 'audit' the enterprise agreement, to see if either men, women, or a specific narrative identity, are advantaged by its content.

## **9.2 Background on the agreement**

The bank workers at the centre of this study have the terms and conditions of their employment covered by a stream of enterprise agreement making that commenced in 1993. The history of enterprise-based negotiations in Australian banking is relatively short. After 1987, individual banks began setting salaries at the enterprise level (not the industry level). There is also evidence that, even after the formal introduction of enterprise bargaining, the working arrangements governing employment for bank staff did not undergo significant change until the mid 1990s. Kitay (1995) notes that other terms and conditions under the award remained the same until well into the 1990s. This is highly significant for the bank managers and explains, in part, their level of anxiety at the point in time the focus group sessions were held. The 1998 enterprise agreement, in the minds of managers, represented the first momentous push by the bank to revolutionise the terms under which retail bank work would be conducted.

Over more than a decade, a number of awards have also been maintained which run parallel to the enterprise agreements covering the working arrangements for these workers. It should be noted that enterprise agreements have been used as the focus of this analysis, because they are the primary tool of regulation with regard to determination of working arrangements for staff. Consistent with the terms of the Commonwealth *Workplace Relations Act 1996*, in the event of any discrepancy between the award and the agreement,



the agreement overrides the award. Each of the agreements identified above include a clause to this effect. The following agreements have covered the managers at the heart of this study since the formal inception of enterprise bargaining:

- Commonwealth Bank of Australia Enterprise Bargaining Agreement 1993. (CBA EA 1993)
- Commonwealth Bank of Australia Enterprise Bargaining Agreement 1996. (CBA EA 1996)
- Commonwealth Bank of Australia Enterprise Bargaining Agreement 1998. (CBA EA 1998)
- Commonwealth Bank of Australia Customer Service Division Enterprise Bargaining Agreement 2000. (CBA EA 2000)
- Commonwealth Bank of Australia Retail Banking Enterprise Bargaining Agreement 2002. (CBA EA 2002)

All of the retail bank managers who participated in these focus groups had, at the time of interview, their employment entitlements detailed by the Commonwealth Bank Certified Enterprise Agreement 1998 (CBA EA98). It should be noted that not all Commonwealth Bank managerial employees within the retail bank network are covered by the same agreement. From 1999 onwards, the Commonwealth Bank made offers to groups of employees (division by division) to abandon the certified collective agreement and enter into an individual Australian Workplace Agreement (AWA). There are figures publicly available that indicate the proportion of Commonwealth Bank staff who are covered by AWAs, however the union has released unofficial estimates in the order of 10-15 per cent.

At the time the focus groups were convened (1999), the CBA EA98 was workplace wide and covered the majority of permanent employees across all divisions of the bank (representatives of the union approximates the coverage at this time to be more than 70 per cent). The only groups of workers not covered by this agreement were in the highly specialised areas of information

technology (covered by the Technology, Operations and Property agreement) and call centres (covered by the Direct Banking agreement).

### **9.3 Scope of the audit**

Enterprise agreements can incorporate an extensive range of entitlements. A wide body of comparative research has been built around analysis of 'archetypal' clause content (for example, annual and sick leave). Work by ACIRRT (2001) and Lansbury, Wright and Baird (2005) present models of this type of research. Other comparative research has focused on mapping the incidence of innovative or unconventional clause content (Buchanan 2000) to make determinations about the efficiency and equity of agreement outcomes.

The agreement making stream in the Commonwealth Bank includes a wide range of clauses which span both typical and atypical content. The agreement includes typical working entitlements (for example, annual leave, part time work, pay and remuneration and working hours), but also atypical working arrangements and entitlements which are specific to the conditions at the bank (for example, unlimited sick leave and access to subsidized home loans for staff). This chapter will not attempt to provide an historical account of the evolution of each clause within the agreement. Rather, this chapter will conduct an audit of the agreement, using managers' preferences as the basis of the evaluation.

It is also important to note that this chapter will not seek to assess or critique the behaviour of union officials, or senior human resource managers, during negotiation. This thesis does not seek to disregard this topic, as it is clearly one of the most critical components of agreement evolution from preference to enshrined entitlement. However, this thesis does not consider these questions for two main reasons. Firstly, this thesis seeks to test key assumptions associated with women and enterprise bargaining research, and these have pertained largely to agreement content. Secondly, the expansiveness of this topic, I argue, justifies the examination of the question of union and employer strategy as a subject matter in its own right. Therefore, the minutiae of tactics,

conflict and negotiating compromise between the parties is beyond the scope of this thesis.

#### 9.4 Preferences to remedy understaffing

Both men and women agreed that the bank-wide decisions to downsize and restructure the retail bank network had contributed to the understaffing problem. For this reason, both men and women identified a need to increase staffing levels, but argued different strategies would be necessary to address key aspects of the problem. Men (both of the institutional market and the bureaucratic career narratives) placed specific emphasis on the restoration of junior level administrative (or support roles) to ease the burden of the workload for managers. Women (of both diplomatic and market narratives) argued that understaffing could only be effectively addressed by broad based increases to staff levels, across a range of levels and divisions.

At the time of interview, the issue of staffing was noted by the 1998 agreement, however, the decision making processes and routines associated with determination of staffing levels have historically been reflected within internal personnel policies. The clause of the CBA EA1998 is broad, and gives emphasis to the need to balance staffing decisions in the context of business objectives.

*“The bank and the FSU recognise that staffing levels which reflect customer needs and usage patterns as well as business levels are necessary to the achievement of the bank’s business objectives” (CBA EA 1998: clause 35).*

Analysis of the CBA EA 2000 reveals that neither men’s nor women’s preferences to increase staffing levels are incorporated. Further to this, nowhere in the agreement has any further clause or amendment been introduced to deal with the overall level of staffing. Clause 35 in the CBA EA 1998 has been maintained in CBA EA 2000 as clause 15, but remains virtually unchanged. The only small alteration relates the phrasing associated with “business objectives” which has been adapted to a slightly stronger phrasing “business needs” (which places even more emphasis on the commercial ‘imperative’ shaping working arrangements).



*“.1The Bank and the FSU recognize that staffing levels which reflect customer needs and usage patterns as well as business levels are necessary to the achievement of the Bank's business needs (2000 & 2002 CBA EAs).*

Both men and women argued that the 'quotas' or practices associated with determination of staff levels were problematic, and needed redress by the agreement. Men argued that branch managers should have power to hire and fire staff with greater discretion. Women were more specific in their preferences, and argued that quotas should be re-adjusted to take account of branch characteristics (regional and demographic in particular).

The CBA EA 1998 makes only a cursory reference to the determination practices that apply to staffing levels. The agreements commits the bank only to *"review staffing levels on a regular basis"* (clause 35), but sets no timeline for how often this review should occur and places no obligation on the bank to be consultative about the process.

The CBA EA 2000 agreement introduces (for the first time in the history of agreements at the bank) a highly specific clause with regard to determination of staffing levels. Interestingly, this clause is maintained in the most recent CBA EA 2002. This clause has been significantly redrafted and includes a component which appears to specifically address the concerns raised by women, however, the concerns raised by men have not been addressed.

*.3When determining staffing levels for a workplace, the bank will take into account all relevant local factors including but not limited to staffing experience, demographics and business opportunities.*

This clause again places the review and adjustment of staffing levels firmly in the context of the competitive needs of the business, however, 'local factors' are also included as relevant to the calculation of staffing levels including the demographic characteristics identified as important by women managers.

Men's preference to expand the decision making role of the branch manager to incorporate more staffing issues, is not contained in the CBA EA 2000. In

fact, the branch manager role is entirely absent from the staffing clause. The clause does include a commitment to review staffing levels regularly, however, this obligation to review is clearly placed in the context of business needs and does not include any provision to assess the impact for staff in changes to staffing policy.

Both men and women argued that vacancies in substantive positions (due to staff promotion, transfer of permanent substantive staff, and short or long term leaves of absence) were often left 'unfilled' in the medium to long term (in some cases for several months or up to a year). Branch managers, under the current system, were constrained in their ability to fill these vacancies. Men argued that this constraint could be most effectively eased by giving branch managers the discretion to 'back-fill' positions. Women emphasized that area managers need to be more 'lenient' in their decisions and be more prompt in granting approvals to recruit permanent staff and 'back-fill'.

CBA EA 1998 does include a commitment to fill vacancies promptly, again with a tempered reference to fill these vacancies consistent with 'business needs'. *"It will also take all reasonable steps to fill vacant positions promptly consistent with business needs". (CBA EA 1998: clause 35)*

CBA EA 2000 also includes a commitment to review staffing arrangements, however, the clause is similar in almost all respects to the 1998 agreement. In this case, neither the preferences of men nor women are reflected in the CBA EA 2000.

*.2The Bank and FSU recognize the need for regular review and prompt adjustment to staffing arrangements to reflect the rapidly changing nature of the competitive environment. (clause 15)*

Women noted the problems associated with back-filling positions inappropriately, in particular, the appointment of temporary staff who did not have any position-specific skills (for example, telling versus customer service, versus back-house processing skills). The CBA EA 2000 does include an additional clause suggesting that the bank has taken on board some of the

womens' feedback on the need to provide 'appropriate' relief staff. This clause does appear to acknowledge some of the problems created by an extreme mismatch of skill and position.

*.4Where vacancies or absences occur (other than for RDOs), the Bank will provide the most appropriate relief having regard to the nature of the role and its business needs.*

In large part it does not appear that the CBA EA 2000 has achieved the degree of change being sought by either women or men on this issue. In order for problems with the agreement to be resolved, managers were seeking much greater detail or specificity in what should define a reasonable period of time for prompt backfilling. The revised clause contained in the CBA EA 2000 still places no provision for 'appropriate timing' or a definition for 'prompt placement'.

Both men and women raised major grievances over the staffing decisions made by area managers, arguing that these decisions were often too 'arbitrary'. Both men and women sought a greater degree of 'fairness' in decision-making processes, greater consultation with and inclusion of branch managers in these decisions, and improved opportunities for feedback from area managers about the approach used, and the rationale underlying the approach.

CBA EA 1998 contains a clause which appears to directly address the issue of consultation with branch managers and assistant managers. However, the testimonies of the staff show that the provision was not being adhered to by bank practices at the time of interview.

*The bank will continue to educate managers on its approach to staffing and provide opportunity for their involvement in determining staffing arrangements in their workplace" (CBA EA 1998: clause 35).*

The testimonies of staff show that this provision was not reflective of working practices at the time of interview. For this reason, men and women agreed that this provision needed strengthening so that the bank would be obligated (in



some form) to enact consultation processes on staffing, directly with those teams (branches) most affected by the decisions.

CBA EA 2000 shows a weakening of this provision. The phrasing which places an obligation on the bank to provide opportunities for the involvement of line managers has been entirely removed. The term 'educate' has also been removed, which at least implied some responsibility for the bank to ensure managers comprehend and understand the context in which staffing decisions are made. Further to this, the obligation under the CBA EA 2000 is for "managers" only to 'discuss' staffing arrangements, and the content of these discussions is not outlined or prescribed. The level of managers (whether area, branch or middle managers) are not specifically identified by the clause. *"Managers will discuss staffing arrangements with their staff"* (CBA EA 2000: clause 15).

The overarching observation about this clause is the strong emphasis given to 'business needs' as the justification for decisions with regard to staffing. From the outset, staffing decisions are to be placed within the context of business needs. This is consistent with the overall tone of the agreement, which from the outset sets as a primary objective or vision of the agreement to be efficient and competitive. *"The bank, its employees and the FSU recognize that to remain competitive in a rapidly changing environment, the bank must provide the most efficient and flexible ongoing service to customers"* (CBA EBA 2002: 6).

#### **9.4.1 Final analysis of agreement's performance on staffing issue**

Table 19 presents a summary of the CBA EA 2000's performance with regard to addressing managers' concerns over staffing. The only issues that are, in some limited way, reflected by the agreement are those relating to two preferences indicated specifically by women managers. Women emphasized two staffing issues as requiring redress – the need to refine quotas or formulas in staffing branches, and the need to fill staff vacancies promptly and appropriately. Both of these concerns do appear to be noted by the agreement. The bank commits to filling vacant positions promptly, consistent with

business needs, and commits to provide appropriate relief in the event of staff vacancies. The bank also makes a commitment to set staffing quotas with some consideration of staffing experience, demographics and local characteristics in mind.

**Table 19            Understaffing, preferences to redress, men and women managers**

<b>Women’s preferences</b>	<b>Included</b>
Increase staff at all occupational levels	✗
Change resourcing formula to take into account branch characteristics	✓
Process to backfill should be speedier	✓
	(partial)
<b>Men’s preferences</b>	
Increase staff at junior levels	✗
Return resourcing decisions to branch manager level	✗
Backfilling decisions should be returned to branch manager level	✗

The desire expressed by men managers to involve the branch manager in the decision making processes relating to staffing is not addressed in any form within the agreement. The only mention of the managerial role is defined in terms of asserting a generic obligation on a manager (the level is left undefined) to discuss staffing arrangements with staff, but does not empower the branch manager to be involved in the determination of these staffing levels. The issue of branch manager consultation in the formulation of staff quotas is not covered by the agreement. In fact, the portion of the clause which provided for some (albeit minimal) consultation with the branch manager in the development of staffing quotas has been excluded entirely from CBA EA 2002. The only mention of the manager in the 2002 clause on staffing is the obligation of the manager to discuss staffing changes with staff.

In addition, the weakened wording of the clause relating to staffing in the CBA EA 2000 shows even less commitment on the part of the bank to the issues raised by the workforce. The commitment to ‘prompt replacement’ is very broad without any overarching definition for ‘prompt’. This gives the bank a wide degree of latitude with regard to filling vacancies, particularly when the commitment is made ‘consistent with business needs’.



## 9.5 Preferences to remedy performance appraisal problems

Analysis of this clause reveals that there is little evidence of the specific preferences presented by men or women managers. This revised clause is not significantly different to the clause present CBA EA 1998. As is the case with CBA EA 2000, CBA EA 1998 does not contain any details of the system of performance appraisal that covered employees at the time of interview. Only one section of the agreement (relating to the notion of sales management) makes any reference, or even acknowledges that employees would be required to meet certain expectations with regard to sales targets. CBA EA 2000 identifies the concept of sales management as an underlying principle of customer service work.

*"1 The FSU acknowledge the underlying concepts and principles of the bank's sales management process and supports the objective of enhancing business growth in highly competitive markets through fair and equitable application of those principles. The bank will continue to articulate to its managers the need for fair and consistent application of sales management principles and will reinforce fair and effective use of the sales management process in light of ongoing experience, including feedback from employees. The bank will continue to consult with the FSU on the impact on employees. 9A.2 The sales management process will be applied in a manner that is both fair and reasonable for the individual and will reflect a set of principles consistent with those advised to the FSU at the time of certification of this Agreement. 9A.3 The Bank will continue to consult with the FSU on the impact on employees"* (CBA EA 2000: clause 9A).

Performance management, and the associated guidelines of operation for this system have not been systematically addressed or outlined by the agreement-making stream historically. The introduction and existence of performance appraisal is acknowledged by the enterprise agreement negotiations, but at no point in the last decade (since the inception of the first collective enterprise agreement for the bank) has a detailed account or process for performance management fallen within the scope of working arrangements covered by the enterprise agreement.

*"The FSU acknowledge the underlying concepts and principles of the bank's sales management process and supports the objective of enhancing business growth in highly competitive markets through fair and equitable application of*



*those principles. The bank will continue to articulate to its managers the need for fair and consistent application of sales management principles and will reinforce fair and effective use of the sales management process in light of ongoing experience, including feedback from employees. The bank will continue to consult with the FSU on the impact on employees" (CBA EA 1998: clause 36).*

The foundation of this approach is revealed by looking at earlier agreements that set the context for negotiations of CBA EA 1998. As early as CBA EA 1993, negotiations between the union and the Bank firmly place the issue of performance management outside the scope of the agreement process. The agreement indicates only that parties agree to the introduction of the system, with few alternatives set out for employees to object to the principles laid out by the system of performance assessment.

The only specific reference to performance assessment is in clause 7 of CBA EA 1993. This clause flags the introduction of the Continuous Improvement Program (CIP), which was the title of the performance and productivity system at the time. The only other reference is found in clause 25 which flags the intent of the bank to introduce a new system of performance management in the coming two years.

*7(i) This agreement is designed to consolidate past improvements and to facilitate the transition of the Bank to a fully commercial, competitive organization. In recognition of this vision, it is the objective of this agreement to create a workplace culture and reward system which maximizes productivity and ensures consistently high customer service...In conformity with the above, during the term of this agreement, the Bank will implement a major restructure of its operation known as the Continuous Improvement Program (CIP). The CIP will build a completely new retail network structure to serve the Bank's external and internal customers with the objective of improving the Bank's performance, productivity and competitive position*  
*(ii) The Bank and the Union recognise that the introduction of the CIP will return substantial efficiency and productivity gains to the Bank and seeks to encourage an environment of continuous improvement.*  
*(iii) The Bank and the Union acknowledge that the CIP will have a major impact upon staff and their working arrangements and will continue to consult on these issues".*

*25 The Bank is committed, subject to agreement with the Union, to introduce performance rewards to recognize team productivity and efficiency improvements, improved customer satisfaction and improvement business results, and will by January 1994 have commenced negotiations with the*



*intention of introducing a scheme within the term of this agreement (CBA EA 1993: clause 7 & 25 respectively).*

Rather than expand or further develop the details of the performance system, CBA EA 1996 places the issue of staff appraisal more firmly outside the jurisdiction of the agreement. Clause 7 of CBA EA 1996 states that these discussions (between union, workforce and bank) will occur and may be finalized during the course of the agreement's life. In other words, this allows changes to the performance appraisal to occur, without it being necessary for parties to reflect these changes in the agreement at all.

*"To enable the Bank to meet its customers needs in a competitive manner, the Bank and the Union recognize the need for workplace efficiency and the highest standards of customer service. The Bank and the Union are committed to achieving this through continuous improvement and workplace reform during life of the agreement. In making this commitment the parties acknowledge that the achievement of on-going change may involve productivity bargaining. The appropriate form and value of recognition for officers' contributions will be agreed between the parties. This recognition may occur during the life of the agreement or as part of the productivity basis for the next enterprise bargaining agreement" (CBA EA 1996: 4).*

CBA EA 2002 does little beyond acknowledgement of the scheme's existence, and certainly sets no terms or parameters for the 'fairness' or 'equity' of the system. Targets, and how these should be determined and applied are not mentioned.

*"All employees covered by this agreement will be eligible to participate in the PRP scheme". Performance will run on a financial year calendar, and the overall rating (from meets expectations to exceeds expectations) will determine the proportion of the salary to be paid (as a lump sum at the end of the financial year)" (CBA EA 2002: clause 20).*

#### **9.5.1 Final analysis of agreement's performance on performance appraisal issues**

Neither women's nor men's concerns regarding performance appraisal have been addressed by the CBA EA 2000 (see table 20). Only one issue appears to have been partially addressed, and this pertains to the need for a fair and transparent process. There is some evidence of a strengthening to this

provision through the inclusion of the need to maintain ‘principles’ as negotiated with the union at the time of certification. In other words, the principles of fairness are not ‘up for re-negotiation’ or cannot be dissolved during the course of the agreement’s life (any substantial revision to these principles needs to be reflected in agreement negotiations).

*The bank will continue to consult with the FSU on the impact on employees.*  
*9A.2 The sales management process will be applied in a manner that is both fair and reasonable for the individual and will reflect a set of principles consistent with those advised to the FSU at the time of certification of this Agreement.*

**Table 20      Performance appraisal, preferences to redress, men and women managers**

Women’s preferences	Included
Reduce targets for all staff	✗
Greater accountability of area manager decisions relating to performance evaluations and target setting	✓ (partial)
Develop targets mindful of branch characteristics	✗
Men’s preferences	
Reduce targets for all staff	✗
Reduce administrative burden for branch managers by hiring junior staff	✗

**9.6      Preferences to remedy training problems**

The training arrangements over the course of the agreement making (which commenced in 1993) had changed radically. While on the job training, mentoring (buddying or shadowing of a junior trainee with an experienced staff member), day or week release to attend orientation or in-house training, had once been common bank practice, these programs were abolished in the wave of restructuring to occur in the early 1990s. The agreement provided no provision for this to occur, rather the agreement had expanded opportunities for staff to gain higher qualification (provided this training was relevant to the scope of bank work). Examples would include human resource management, accountancy, business management and finance).



Women managers advocated that the problems lie with an imbalance in the ratio of experienced to novice staff. Inexperienced staff, it was argued, created a burden for all team members. The formula currently used by more senior management to staff branches was identified as a main problem. Men advocated strongly that branch-level managers in particular, required increased support from senior level managers in the administration and management of training access. The perceived disintegration of a long term career path for these managers was also argued by men managers as requiring immediate redress.

The agreement making stream (spanning a decade) makes only very limited reference to training arrangements for the bank workforce. CBA EA 1998 does not, in fact, provide a comprehensive starting point for many of the issues raised by either men or women in the context of the focus groups. Only two issues (raised by the worker interviews) were, even in the broadest sense, introduced to the agreement content – the broad level of training opportunities within the bank, and the provision of a staff study scheme that facilitates access to higher degrees. These will now be discussed in turn.

CBA EA 1998 contains a single provision dealing with training opportunities and the overall level of training provided by the bank. The clause is very proscriptive in its scope, making a commitment to strengthen career and training opportunities for part time employees only.

*The bank will strengthen career opportunities for part time employees by:  
Providing additional options resulting from greater flexibility by both the  
employee and the bank including increased access to part time work (or job  
sharing) in classified positions;*

*Wider access to training and skill development eg higher duty reliefs;*

*Internal advertising of pte vacancies wherever practicable; and*

*Highlight role model examples (CBA EA 1998: clause 16.5. CBA EA 2003:*

*12. CBA EA 2000: 7).*

Neither the specific nor generic preferences for training have been incorporated by the CBA EA 2000 or subsequent agreements. CBA EA 2000 and CBA EA 2002 have maintained the clause outlined above, and continue to maintain the exclusive emphasis on part time employees. For other workers, or full time staff, training arrangements continue to lie outside the scope of enterprise agreements. Training arrangements (their contents and administration) lie only within the scope of personnel and company policies.

Women workers in particular showed strong support for the staff study scheme in place at the bank, at the time of interview. CBA EA 1998 does indeed contain a clause in relation to the staff study scheme, however, the clause reflects the bank's intent to withdraw detailed policy content out of formal industrial instruments (such as agreements or awards) and place it within the control of personnel policies.

*The Bank and the FSU agree that clause 54 of the award containing staff study provisions will be deleted and confined to bank policy. The terms of the staff study scheme have been agreed with the FSU and future changes to the scheme may be made by the bank following discussion with the FSU (CBA EA 1998: clause 30).*

Interestingly, CBA EA 2000 contains no clause with regard to a staff study scheme at all. However, CBA EA 2002 does make two references to a staff study entitlement. The agreement sets out the opportunity for the union and bank to continue to negotiate on the content of the scheme, and asserts the right of staff to a continued entitlement to a staff study scheme in principle. However, the actual content or details of these entitlements are not supplied in the agreement, and remain in the realm of personnel policies.

*"The terms of the staff study scheme have been agreed with the FSU and future changes to the scheme may be made by the bank following discussion with the FSU" (CBA EA 2002: clause 35).*

CBA EA 2002 also allows some scope for unpaid leave from work, to provide support for staff wishing to pursue further study (if this is relevant to the workers' employment). Under the 'career break' scheme, the CBA EA 2002 includes a provision for workers to take a leave of absence of up to three years. Among the applicability criteria listed for this scheme are "*study which is relevant to the employee's employment with the bank*" (CBA EA 2002: clause 38).

An analysis of the agreement history with regard to the staff study scheme, shows a longer term intention by the bank to eliminate the scheme from the realm of more formal industrial entitlements and contain the policy strictly to internal company policies.

In 1993, the staff study scheme was available in its most comprehensive form in both the federal bank officer's award and the enterprise agreement. The scheme provided a detailed schedule of reimbursements that the bank would be required to pay (including HECS) and detailed the payment of text books and fees applicable to a range of different courses (including TAFE courses, undergraduate degrees, specialized or stand alone units on banking, and even masters and higher degree courses).

In 1996, during course of negotiations over CBA EA 1996, the staff study clause (clause 54) of the award was removed and replaced with a staff study provision which would only appear in the agreement. Clause 15 of CBA EA 1996 states:

*The bank and the union agree that the following will be the features of the staff study scheme. To reflect this clause 54 of the award will be deleted and replaced by the following provisions:*

- a) Subject to the provisions of this clause, the bank shall provide study assistance to an officer who undertakes a course of study, excluding postgraduate study, where the course is relevant to the profession of banking. (It states later in the clause that permission to study postgraduate study will be at the discretion of the bank)*
- b) Continued eligibility for study assistance shall be subject to the attainment of a thoroughly competent level of performance and demonstrated academic achievement.*



*c)The following assistance shall be provided to officers whose study assistance is approved in accordance with this clause (CBA EA 1996: clause 15).*

**9.6.1 Final analysis of agreement’s performance on training problems**

The CBA EA 2000 does not reflect the preferences of either men or women with regard to training arrangements (see table below).

**Table 21      Training, preferences to redress, men and women managers**

<b>Women’s preferences</b>	<b>Included</b>
Improve level of training in retail branches: provision of CBA training for current job and job tasks	✗
Improve level of support for tertiary education through use of greater subsidies for fees and more study leave	✗
<b>Men’s preferences</b>	
Improve level of training in retail branches: provision of CBA training available beyond current level	✗

On only one issue, does the agreement even reflect the basic elements of the preference – the maintenance of a staff study scheme. Although the presence of this scheme is noted by the agreement, terms relating to staff access of the scheme (for example, frequency of use and eligibility criteria) have not been developed within the agreement. The range of entitlements associated with this scheme in general, appear to have progressively weakened over the decade of agreement making.

**9.7 Conclusion**

This chapter has used a detailed account of the preferences of men and women managers (as identified by chapters seven and eight) to ascertain whether the final agreement formed (the 2000 enterprise agreement) reflects any, or all of the preferences indicated. A key question set for this chapter asks whether women’s preferences are not addressed, or are left poorly addressed by this agreement. The analysis shows that neither the enterprise agreement negotiated immediately after the focus group (2000), nor any subsequent agreements (2002) incorporated the substantial level of change being sought by the workforce. Most interesting however, the preferences advanced by

men were not reflected at all by the agreement. On the issue of preferences advanced by women, in large part the agreement did not reflect the key areas of change being sought. This chapter has noted that while some preferences advanced by women may have received attention in the agreement, in most cases they were only a partial reflection of the change or redress being sought.

**10.1 Introduction**

This thesis makes a number of methodological, conceptual and empirical contributions to the field of enterprise bargaining research. The literature review highlights that much previous research has been driven by the need to decipher generic 'outcomes' for women, based on exploration of bargaining experiences for women facing a range of 'worst case' labour market and workplace scenarios. This thesis has placed particular emphasis on exploring bargaining experiences and outcomes for a group of women who represent a contrasting set of characteristics or 'better case' bargaining scenario. The case study presented by this thesis deals with a group of women managers, located in a well unionised industry who demonstrate a high degree of awareness of the industrial landscape and profess a high level of career and professional commitment.

A unique methodological approach is applied to the examination of outcomes for women, by providing a concurrent analysis of the experience of bargaining for both men and women, who share the common characteristics of both occupation, rank and workplace setting. The preferences of these men and women managers are then used to 'audit' enterprise agreement outcomes.

Conceptually, the thesis applies a new theoretical framework to understanding both the content and nomination of enterprise agreement preferences. The approach is unique because it shifts the focus of the analysis to a qualitative account of preferences, thereby bringing both the content of preference but also the rationale for the preference to the foreground of the analysis.

**10.2 Methodological contribution**

This thesis argues that attempts to map generic outcomes with regard to enterprise bargaining and women have to date, proved ineffectual. The evidence presented by this thesis also suggests that standard indicators, traditionally used to assess 'quality of life' outcomes, may also need



significant revision. This thesis notes that the challenges with regard to discerning and understanding the impact of enterprise bargaining on women, and indeed men, are likely to intensify. The impact of broader institutional and structural change on women's workplace level experience remains inscrutable to analysis. A number of researchers in this field lobby a strong case for a more 'disaggregated' picture of bargaining outcomes (Whitehouse 2001; Arsovska, Heiler and Hall 1999). The findings of this thesis too, suggest that there is much greater variation in bargaining outcome, and preference, than early research in this field would suggest.

This research has highlighted that while both women and men exhibit strong consensus on the identification of the key problems facing the workforce (understaffing, under-training and poor performance appraisal), the strategies they propose to solve these problems reflect different agendas in terms of both career development and managerial role. These strategies are clearly not differentiated by the desire to counterbalance work and family responsibilities alone.

### **10.3 Analysis predicated on preference content**

The evidence presented by this thesis gives support to calls by researchers such as Thornthwaite (2001) that a more detailed understanding of preferences must be a feature of future research in this field. The literature review of this thesis notes that a gendered picture of worker preferences for working arrangements has not been adequately considered by research. This thesis has sought to capture a highly detailed account of the preferences of a specific occupational group. This picture shows a level of preference diversity can exist, even within a single occupational group and common workplace setting. A wide range of factors appear to feed into this preference diversity including recent restructuring, workplace culture and career narratives underlying the goals of individual managers. While previous literature has highlighted that patterns in preferences can form as a result of needs to balance work and family, this thesis sheds light on a range of other factors that influence preference formation. In particular, preferences are also formed in response to perceived risks posed to career, professional integrity and workplace role.

This supports evidence from previous studies such as (Hogarth, Hasluck, Pierre and Vivien 2000), who argued that it is misleading to assume the motivation for a preference, based on an analysis of the content or characteristics of the preference alone. In the case of the bank managers at the heart of this study, the need to reduce working hours was clearly motivated by a necessity to reduce the amount of workplace pressure, stress and work intensification created directly by restructuring and downsizing. The need to introduce further support for training was recognised by both men and women managers, but motivated by a different set of responses to career crisis. Without a closer examination of the motivations and rationale for a preference, this level of dissatisfaction among the workers may remain hidden and therefore unreported.

The restructuring and bargaining experiences of these managers demonstrate the value of an approach which gives emphasis to a workplace, occupational and industry focus. For the managers in this case study, strategies to minimize career risk directly influenced their enterprise agreement preferences. For other occupational groups, the drivers may indeed be very different.

#### **10.4 The role of family-friendly clauses**

The qualitative data contained in this thesis suggests that while distinctively gendered preference patterns may be present, the areas of similarity between men's and women's preferences may be greater than the areas of difference. Previous research has assumed that family-specific clauses will play a founding role in the enterprise agreement preferences of women. This assumption is not borne out by the findings of this thesis. Rather, preference analysis provided in the context of this case study shows that neither women nor men perceive family-friendly clauses as the appropriate way to approach a range of fundamental working time issues that are clearly at crisis point. Edgar (1996) notes the piece-meal way in which employers respond to the need to address more flexible forms of working time that are family friendly. The add-on approach to consistent family-friendly reform is rejected by these workers, and instead a consistent, 'fair' and integrated system of working time is being sought by these workers. This gives support to research claims made

by others (Whitehouse 2001 and ACIRRT 1999) that a reliance on broad based indicators (such as generic 'flexible' working time clauses) may be an increasingly inappropriate way to assess the level of family-friendliness associated with a particular employment contract or agreement.

Women managers did, however, appear to have a distinctive pattern in the preferences they sought in the enterprise agreements. In particular, strong support for commitment to further education and training opportunities that had legitimacy outside the bank structure were supported by both narrative identities present among women (the diplomatic and market career narratives). In addition, women (of both narrative identity groups) gave support for the enterprise agreement to better codify the transparency of decision making routines, and accountability processes of bank work.

#### **10.5 Understanding the nature and context of marginalisation**

This thesis also sought to explore assumptions with regard to women's experience of marginalisation *within* enterprise bargaining. In particular, three assumptions were identified for further exploration during the course of this thesis. Firstly, previous research has assumed that men's behaviour will marginalise the ability of women to engage in the bargaining process. Secondly, previous research has assumed that women will be less likely to firmly assert preferences, and will shy away from the adversarial nature of many bargaining forums. Finally, it has been assumed that women's preferences (largely because of their family-specific content) will be marginalised or 'omitted' from agreement content.

This thesis has shed light on the processes, behaviours and practices that seek to marginalize women. A number of feminist researchers highlight the need to expose those 'hidden' processes, acts and behaviour that both define and promulgate women's marginalisation. Both Wajcman (1998) and Williams refer to the importance of research objectives that seek to expose workplace processes that 'name men as men'. This thesis attempts to shed some further light on these processes. The focus group discussions and the strong alignment between men over preferences, even across very different narrative



identities, does suggest some collusion to divert the course of the agreement to serve the interests of career paternalism within the bank. Both key groups of men (institutional market narrative identities and bureaucratic career identities) aligned strongly over preferences to increase their level of status, leadership and authority within the bank hierarchy. Women managers did not seek to extend their personal dominion within the bank, but sought to instigate more effective 'due process' so that transparency and accountability could be afforded to workers in the event of future agreement breach. The changes to target formulation and the desire to ensure that senior managers conform to feedback and accountability processes over decision making are two examples of the preferences forwarded by women managers.

The final assumption suggests that women's preferences will ultimately be marginalised and left unrepresented by the final content of enterprise agreements. While women's preferences were not reflected by the final enterprise agreement, it is also important to note that men's preferences were not included either. In reality, a few preferences forwarded by women were reflected by the final enterprise agreement, while none of the preferences forwarded by men were. This finding directly challenges a number of strong rhetorical claims made by the federal government with regard to its policy infrastructure surrounding enterprise bargaining. The case study of this bank shows that the needs and aspirations of neither women nor men are being served by the current bargaining environment. This directly challenges claims by government that bargaining will present opportunities to give voice to a wider range of individual worker-driven concerns. The reluctance by employers to undertake and commit significantly to any of the preferences expressed shows that women appear to be at significant risk of marginalisation by the employer, rather than their fellow male managers.

The evidence of this case study shows how heavily underestimated the degree to which employer prerogative has grown, and now defines and drives the terms for enterprise agreements. In many senses, the managers involved in this case study were heavily 'advantaged' – a long term and stable career path, strong union representation and a position of influence and some authority

within their workplace. Yet, competitive pressures and a restructuring program driven by the employer, had left these employees with little in the way of leverage of favourable enterprise agreement outcomes. While the industrial campaign run by the FSU was not without its flaws, and the FSU had publicly reneged on a number of its strategies, the campaign was fought hard and with strong support from the workforce (FSU 1998). It is a telling account of the amount of power that employers in the current industrial environment wield over the circumstances and outcomes achieved under enterprise bargaining.

#### **10.6 Understanding the impact of restructuring**

The workplace environment at the bank is best described as one in a state of cultural transition. The presence of four narrative identities were found to be present among the managers at the bank, representing a mix of older (bureaucratic) and newer (competitive and individualist) cultural groups within the bank. The way in which these narrative identities co-exist, and in some cases collaborate and collude, provides additional evidence to support Wacjman and Martin's (2004) claims that narrative identities should not necessarily be perceived as being 'mutually exclusive'. No single narrative necessarily emerges as the definitive account for the impact of new capitalism, and that these different narratives represent different aspects of social change as they are experienced by different actors.

This thesis has not assessed the extent to which women can accommodate family responsibilities within career narratives, rather, this thesis contends that career narratives are also formed by and informed by the conditions at the workplace level. While the work of Wajcman and Martin (2001) highlights the need to consider how circumstances at home can influence the formation of career narratives for women, it is also important to understand those workplace factors that create but also inhibit the formation of career narratives. As the evidence from this thesis shows, understanding the underlying career narrative, and how workplace circumstance and culture have informed this process can shed light on the composition of enterprise agreement preferences to a much greater level of detail.

This thesis also provides some additional insights to the current body of scholarship on career narrative identities. As Wajcman and Martin (2004) note in their research on career narratives, previous narrative typologies have tended to be 'static'. Wajcman and Martin's (2004; 2001) argue for greater definitional 'elasticity', and recognition of the overlap between categories of narrative. In particular, Wajcman and Martin found institutional loyalty (reminiscent of a bureaucratic narrative) among highly market-oriented narrative identities. Similarly, this thesis suggests the presence of two additional narratives – a diplomatic narrative among women who approach the traditional bureaucratic narrative with a degree of pragmatism, and an institutional market narrative among men seeking to affirm loyalty to the bank while defining their career narrative by 'marketability'. Sennett's (1998) thesis suggests that the new capitalist environment does not currently supply workers with an ability to form and adapt narrative identities. For men managers at the CBA, they continue to exhibit a form of loyalty and desire to inherit the 'legacy' of career promise that has historically defined working life for men within banks. This suggests that the power of the cultural legends associated with these traditional and bureaucratic career paths continue to have a resonance, and are not dissolved as quickly as researchers such as Sennett (1998) might suggest. Among even the youngest male managers in this bank case study, there was evidence of a strong willingness to commit to a bureaucratic narrative, and a desire to adapt the local workplace conditions in a manner consistent with that narrative.

While an element of male collusion does appear to be present within the fraternity of men managers, it is important to note the strength and assertion of the women managers at the bank to put forward preferences that suit their own career and workplace needs as managers. This gives support to the work of researchers such as Atkinson (2002) who suggest that, even in the most hostile of workplace cultures, women will develop responses and strategies to counteract these hegemonies. Other researchers note that women exhibit different levels of 'social awareness' of organisational and institutional barriers in the workplace (Ledwith and Colgan 2002; Whitehead 2001;



Franzway 2001). This qualitative evidence gives support to the argument that women do indeed develop contingent plans that are designed to counteract barriers perceived to inhibit or prevent career progression. Organisational theorists parallel the workplace to a political environment. Occupational groups struggle for power, form alliances and seek to lobby in a way that will bring personally beneficial outcomes (Whitehead 2001; Collinson 1994; Arroba & James 1987). The women within the context of this workplace demonstrate their willingness to negotiate and tactically deal with 'organisational gender politics' (Whitehead 2001).

### **10.7 Future policy implications of research**

The next ten to twenty years will see growing pressure on policy makers to ensure that industrial relations legislation provides an environment able to deal with and accommodate the working time and workplace entitlement preferences of an increasing range of non-standard workers. As researchers have noted, the workforce of the future is likely to be characterized by greater dispersion in the types of working arrangements desired. The needs of carers and parents, versus the needs of non-parents, the needs of older workers who are in transition to retirement, and the expansion of technologies that allow a wider range of telecommuting arrangements to be both feasible and cost effective for firms, are all social and demographic factors that will influence the structure and processes of work. In this deregulated and diverse labour market, the evaluation of a 'positive' outcome under enterprise bargaining will remain crucial, yet increasingly difficult to quantify. This thesis argues that the current policy infrastructure is not sufficiently equipped to be able to deal with this challenge.

For almost a decade, the federal government has progressively disassembled infrastructure within the policy environment which would allow large scale monitoring to occur. Within the bureaucracy, policy units with the designated task of enhancing understanding of women's labour market participation have been pushed to the margins of the policy making process. The Work and Family Unit, a designated unit within the Department of Workplace Relations designed to monitor outcomes and inform government of policy progress with

regard to women's equity has been abolished. In 2004, the Office of the Status of Women was transferred from its central policy advising role in the Department of Prime Minister and Cabinet, to function as a smaller unit within the Department of Family and Community Services. The Office has also cut back much of its emphasis on issues associated with ensuring women's economic security and independence, and is largely concerned with initiatives to reduce domestic violence. Without a significant monitoring commitment by government, the ability to understand (let alone counteract) the impacts of unanticipated and errant policy impacts is severely constrained.

The insight on preferences provided by this research demonstrates that although the incidence of non-standard working arrangements may be on the increase, the impact of these arrangements once in place is highly context-specific and largely misunderstood. The issue is not the breadth of issues (family-specific versus generic clauses) that serves to undermine the strength of bargaining campaigns, but the degree of managerial prerogative that will determine the real impact of agreements once in place. The amount of employer prerogative has undoubtedly expanded in the banking sector, and this has served the interests of neither men nor women in this sector. This is even the case for managers, who might be otherwise considered part of the hegemony of the bank.

This thesis proposes two possible policy reforms that might improve understanding of the impacts of enterprise bargaining, and how bargaining intersects with other processes of workplace change. Firstly, a designated unit, located within a core federal government policy department (Prime Minister and Cabinet) could be established which is responsible for more intense monitoring of outcomes with regard to workplace change. A 'Quality of Working Life' unit could monitor outcomes for both men and women with regard to industrial relations policy, and play a key role in mediating and liaising with other pivotal areas of social policy pertinent to working life (including child care reform, education and training, and occupational health). While the issues of family are obviously highly pertinent to policy formation for women and economic security, the evidence of this thesis demonstrates

that these are not the only concerns that shape women's, or indeed, men's quality of life at work. A small unit within a wider department geared to family concerns (the location of the current Office of the Status of Women) does not represent a significant unit capable of giving the level of profile that these issues need to remain on the policy agenda.

Secondly, the instruments used to monitor outcomes in this field require serious revision. The growing diversity in preferences suggests that the instruments used to monitor outcomes require significant commitment and investigation to determine how these instruments might be better designed. Rather than applying fairly arbitrary measures of outcome that relate to agreement content, it may be more prudent to use worker perceptions as the basis of the analysis in measurement of outcome. A 'Quality of Working Life' index could be developed which focuses primarily on worker perceptions as the key indicator for the level of effectiveness of policy. Bi-annual national surveys could be commissioned which give a reading of both levels of satisfaction with the structure of key entitlements, and more importantly, the access to entitlements. It is true that significant data collection and research on the impact of work and broader labour market change is now being undertaken by the Household Income and Labour Dynamics Survey (HILDA) team based at the University of Melbourne. However, the federal government has effectively torn away the policy conduits that would directly feed findings of this research to inform policy development. As it stands, the model of internal 'policing' that has operated historically within government has been torn away (for example, the Office of Multicultural Affairs, the Office of the Status of Women, the Work and Family Unit). The role of designated policy units that are part of the 'inner circle' of government policy-making has historically, been very important. A designated 'quality of working life' unit, if positioned strategically and given legitimacy by the government would be able to scrutinize the content of new policy proposals and cabinet submissions or indeed, generate new policy proposals.

The quality of working life index could also provide additional information that gives a more accurate account of the impact of policy in shaping the



working lives of Australians. Analysis that relies on capturing the incidence of formal and stated policy (either personnel policies or enterprise agreement content) does not give insight to the *real* impact of these policies on working lives. This gives weight to arguments proposed by Whitehead (1999), Kennelly (2001) and Probert (2000a) that suggest the wider environment, can play an important role in either mitigation or intensification of disadvantage. For example, the culture of the workplace and attitude of managers are pivotal in understanding the difference between the 'lived' experience of an entitlement as opposed to the 'enshrined' entitlement. The evidence presented by this thesis shows that the managers in this study valued the sense of fairness they felt at work, and a quality of working life index could be developed to capture more of these social, psychological, and health dimensions important to the maintenance of reasonable 'standard of working life'. This index would represent a significant improvement on current government monitoring which occurs through the Awards and Agreements Survey which maps sectoral penetration of agreement type, but without providing any measure of impact of these arrangements.

The most obvious gap in this thesis is that the 'behind closed doors' processes of negotiation between management and union have not been brought to light by the analysis. While this is clearly a critical area of bargaining research, these issues remain outside the central aims and scope of this thesis. As the work of Cooper (2000) shows, the negotiations that occur between management teams and union leadership are a matter of significant study in their own right. This thesis has aimed to bring the preferences and narratives of workers themselves to the fore of this discussion, and has not sought to see how these preferences are mediated or transformed during the course of an agreement making process. The auditing process provided by this thesis however, does in some respects, highlight the value of a more detailed understanding of preferences and the role that this approach can play in evaluating the performance of both employers and unions in meeting the needs of employees.

In the long term, greater understanding of worker preferences would permit a more detailed level of, and more systematic scrutiny of both union behaviour and employer behaviour in addressing worker concerns. Employer groups have long criticised unions for not effectively representing worker interests. Women's groups too, have criticised unions for failing to accurately reflect women's preferences and needs. Building a body of knowledge about worker preferences, and the motivations and goals informing preference formation, would help these debates to move beyond rhetoric.

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